H. RICHARD NIEBUHR'S DOCTRINE OF GOD AND CRITICAL REALISM: AN ATTEMPT TO RECONCILE ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY WITH AN EXPERIENTIAL VIEW OF GOD

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FOREWORD

One very important lesson for the student, on which H. Richard Niebuhr insisted over and over in his writings, and I presume in his classes, is that the pursuit of knowledge is a communal activity which builds up on trust and confidence. Though I knew this lesson before I ever came to know Mr. Niebuhr so intimately through studying his writings, my study of his thought has taught me this most emphatically both in his written conceptual analysis of the sociality of faith and in my own process of coming to know these verbal formulations.

Of the conceptual framework of Niebuhr's understanding of faith, this dissertation is replete. Less evident is the community of people who encouraged me in this undertaking. Of them I want to speak in this foreword.

First I would like to speak of the "families" who have given me community. Initially, of course, there is the family of my mother and father, brothers and sisters, whose care for me gave me sensitivity to life and love and learning. Then there is the family of my brother monks at St. John's, whose confidence in me gave me confidence to pursue a doctorate. Then the family at the Newman community at Berkeley, who never let me lose contact with the real-life issues of why I should study theology. Then that marvelous family of Sarpi community whose love and care have given me (and so many students, as they will attest!) hope for love and courage to do the service of love expressed in the mystery of Jesus Christ. And finally, that family of close friends, from "A to Z," whose names I will not mention here, but if you ask and have the time, I will catalogue them for you as proudly as one of those who made the genealogies in the Bible. Each of you knows the ways in which you have given me community.

To all these families, I simply say "Thank you," and express the desire to continue on in community with you.

Some names need to be given here and acknowledged, for these people have had some very immediate contact with this dissertation. Charles McCoy, the first to introduce me to Mr. Niebuhr, has been the last to see me through to the end. Charles has always been most affirming to me even while offering incisive criticism of my work. Bernard Loomer, though a "thorn in my flesh" at times, through his criticism has given this work a size which it otherwise could not have had. Richard Niebuhr, of Harvard Divinity School, son of H. Richard Niebuhr, allowed me access to the unpublished works of his father; without use of this material, this dissertation would not have materialized. Father Pat McNamara, O.S.M., helped me in writing in a clear English style. Margaret Lahiff taught me how patience is paramount in editing and typing a manuscript as perfect as possible. To these people I extend a special thank you.

9 May 1976

Michael Maeder, O.S.B.

Michael Maeder

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CC	*Christ and Culture*
FE	*Faith on Earth*
HRN	H. Richard Niebuhr
KGA	*The Kingdom of God in America*
KF	*Knowledge of Faith*
MR	*The Meaning of Revelation*
RMWC	*Radical Monotheism and Western Culture*
RS	*The Responsible Self*
SSD	*The Social Sources of Denominationalism*

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT OF THESIS AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND FOR H. RICHARD NIEBUHR'S REALISM

To see a person's thought in context is to perceive not only its content but also to discern the depth and nuance of that thought. It is like looking at a portrait. We cannot fully appreciate the painting if we focus only on the main subject without regard both to the way in which the painter has placed his subject in a setting and to the way in which he has used color and the play of light and shadow to enrich the scope of our attention. Awareness of the context of anyone's thought is crucial for a full understanding of that thought.

In fact, the importance of anyone's thought can be measured by its context. For the size of that thought is determined by its context, namely, the limits within which it is framed. These limits in turn are determined in part by the conscious, rational employment of an intellectual tool; but only in part are these limits determined by a conscious use of a methodology. For there is also a pre-reflective, pre-theoretical base to this consciousness which forms the presuppositions of the thought. The greater a person's awareness of his presuppositions, the broader will be his selection of methodologies and his use of them in determining the limits of his thought.

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The size of H. Richard Niebuhr's thought is large because that thought is placed in an inclusive context, both through his conscious use of rational methods and through his attempts to understand the pre-reflective presuppositions of this thought. By his own admission, his awareness of the sovereignty of God is the key to understanding the how and the why of the context within which he places his thought.[1] We accept this admission as a fact in the thought of H. Richard Niebuhr.

Our effort will be to see one of the roads down which Niebuhr travelled in coming to a mature expression of his doctrine of God. At this time that way can be given the name "realism"; later we will need to specify the meaning of this term for Niebuhr.

I. H. Richard Niebuhr as an Epistemological Realist

The use of the term "realism" to describe H. Richard Niebuhr is neither a new nor an original insight into this thought. A recent example of an analysis of Niebuhr which sees him as a realist is a recent survey on modern and contemporary theologians which classified H. Richard Niebuhr along with his brother, Reinhold Niebuhr, under the heading "Christian Realism."[1] The phrase is used in this survey to describe the break in the early 1930's with the confidence of liberal theologians in man's upward social and moral progress; Christian realism saw this confidence as naive and unrealistic. The doctrine of man, as found in liberal theology, envisaged the gradual amelioration of evil through the initiative of mankind. This theological anthropology did not square with the facts of history; it was not realistic. Christian realism therefore drew from the orthodox Christian doctrine of man and from the crisis theology of neo-orthodoxy those elements which tempered the moral optimism of liberal theology with a more realistic reading of the facts of evil in modern society.

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[1] The clearest statement of this admission comes in Niebuhr's autobiographical reflections on his own thought in an article in The Christian Century: "The fundamental certainty given me then (sad to say, not in such a way that my unconscious as well as my conscious mind has been wholly permeated by it) was that of God's sovereignty." H. Richard Niebuhr, "Reformation: Continuing Imperative," 76 (1960), p. 248.

There is no doubt that H. Richard Niebuhr can be called a Christian realist on the basis of his sober acceptance of the facts of evil. We will see how he drew from orthodox Christianity and from the neo-reformation emphases of crisis theology in developing a realistic appraisal of human ethical activity. Our interest however in seeing Niebuhr as a realist is not to analyze how he used the theological understanding of human nature to develop a theological perspective which deals realistically with the facts of evil; rather we are interested in how he developed a distinctive *epistemological* point of view in his theological understanding of God and man which is in direct line with a realist epistemology.

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[1] James A. Livingston, Chapter 15: "Christian Realism: Post-Liberal American Theology," Modern Christian Thought: From Enlightenment to Vatican II (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1971), pp. 446-477.

It is important for our thesis to keep distinct these two meanings of realism, viz., a notion of realism which is critical of moral optimism and a notion of realism which denotes a realist epistemological understanding. For, though Niebuhr was critical of the moral optimism of liberal theology, he did not completely reject the experiential understanding of God which underlies the epistemological realism of certain proponents of liberal theology, in particular, the empirical theologies of Douglas Clyde Macintosh and Henry Nelson Wieman.

This experiential understanding of God, which grew out of a realist understanding of the general epistemological question, is different from the experiential knowledge of God which Karl Barth spoke of in his theology. Niebuhr saw this difference and distinguished himself from Barth, even though he approved of many things in Barth's theology. The experiential understanding of God which Niebuhr developed had more affinity to the views of liberal theology than to Barth's theology because it grew out of a general theory of knowledge. Broadly stated, this epistemological view said that there is a valid religious a priori knowledge which provides for a human experience of God. In this epistemological view, there is a general experience of God common to every individual; the Christian experience of God is only a specific instance of this larger experience. In Barth's view such a general religious knowledge

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is false knowledge of God. For him, God provides not only the objective content of the human experience of him, but also the subjective conditions wherein humans come to know him.

Throughout this dissertation, whenever we speak of Niebuhr's experiential view of God, we are using the words "experience" and "experiential" to refer to this general epistemological view. It does not refer to the experience of God as Barth defined it. It is used to distinguish Niebuhr's view of the human experience of God from Barth's view of the human experience of God. It should be noted that Niebuhr knew the early Barth and that his criticism of Barth grew out of his reading of the early Barth.

Niebuhr had no problem with Barth in this insistence on the reality of God independent from human experience of God's reality. Certainly the whole Christian tradition has followed some kind of realist position in affirming the reality of God separate from human experience of him. In this regard Niebuhr, like Barth, did not deviate from the tradition in his belief in God's reality. From this point of view one can be a supernaturalist and a realist.

However, if God were to remain unexperienced except in revelation, there would be no way that human beings could be said to know this reality which is God. In this view, the experience of God associated with a general view of knowledge and the experience of God associated with faith are totally separate affairs. Niebuhr, however, did not separate the two kinds of experiences; he saw faith as part of the general epistemological question. The experience of God, for Niebuhr, was therefore an epistemological problem. Quite simply stated, the problem is: How do humans know God? Previous to the development of the natural and social sciences, the fact that God existed independently of man and yet was experienced by man was not questioned. God was experienced by man in the ways God chose to let man experience him, whether that way be the general one, accessible to all humans, termed by the scholastics as natural theology, or that way be the one of special revelation bound up with biblical inspiration and the mystery of Jesus Christ as the revealer of God.

A problem with the experience of God, however, has arisen in modern times and increased into contemporary times. It is the difficulty which grew out of the question whether a God who exists separate from experience and who transcends that experience can ever be said to be experienced unless he somehow miraculously intervenes in the cosmic processes of the natural world and in the psychological processes of the human world. One way of solving this problem is to affirm as fact that there can be no human experience of God other than that which happens in revelation. The only way we know God then is through his miraculous intervention in human history and in the cosmic processes of nature. From this point of view, all knowledge of God is a grace--grace in this instance understood as miraculous. Epistemologically this way is agnostic, for it says that in no

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way can humans know the independently existing reality which is God except as he reveals himself to us in a miraculous fashion. Another way of solving this problem is to say that men do experience God in a way which does not exceed the normal human ways of knowing. Epistemologically this way can be interpreted in an idealist fashion or in a realist fashion. For the former, God is--as all reality is--mind, or he is some kind of projection of human mind. For the latter, God is a reality existing separate from our knowing him but nonetheless experienceable by us. Knowledge is a relational activity in the realist view. Depending on the type of realism that one espouses, the relation can either be direct, a one-on-one relation between subject and object, or it can be indirect, a social relation between two subjects and a common object. The realist position can therefore be distinguished further by the emphasis one puts on whether men can experience God's reality totally and directly, or only partially and indirectly.

Broadly speaking, those who hold to a human experience of God without resorting to a miraculous revelation and a normative tradition built around this revelation belong to the movement known as liberal Protestantism. The basic concern of liberalism was to restate Christian theology in a way which would appeal to intelligent men of modern times; in the view of liberalism, orthodox Christianity was no longer an adequate vehicle to express the meaning of Christianity in an intelligent and convincing manner. From the liberal point of view, the overriding difficulty which orthodox Christianity faced in trying to meet the modern mind was with the scientific mentality. The natural and social sciences did not grant a special status to the experience of God which exempted this experience from the scrutiny to which all human experience was subjected by the scientific method. From the viewpoint of science, to exempt the experience of God from scientific analysis was tantamount to epistemological agnosticism.

Niebuhr recognized that the deficiency of traditional orthodoxy and neo-orthodoxy, from an epistemological point of view, lay in its epistemological agnosticism. He saw that the way out of this agnosticism was through an epistemological realism which granted the possibility of a human experience of God without resorting to miraculous intervention. To keep Niebuhr's understanding of the human experience of God distinct from a miraculous understanding of it, we will call Niebuhr's understanding an experiential view of God.

By espousing an experiential view of God, Niebuhr associated himself with theological liberalism. But Niebuhr is not a liberal theologian. For though it is true that in his early years Niebuhr did entertain some views close to the views of theological liberalism, he did not stay with the liberal viewpoint in his mature thought. Yet in his mature thought Niebuhr did hold to a human experience of God. This fact indicates that Niebuhr did not consider an experiential view of God incompatible with the traditional orthodox view of God.

It seems that the theological problem as Niebuhr saw it was to reconcile a notion of revelation with an experiential view of God. In Niebuhr's view, the experiential view of God is broader than a revelatory experience of him, but it is not contradictory to an experience of him which happens in revelation. For Niebuhr the experiential view is the basis for revelation; thereupon revelation becomes the transformation of the experiential knowledge of God. To Niebuhr, if one does not attempt to reconcile an experiential view of God with a revelatory view, then revelation and the orthodox Christian tradition are left in a very precarious position vis-à-vis a position which subjects all experience to procedures of scientific testing. Through his experiential view of the human experience of God as the basis for revelation, Niebuhr thought that he had exempted a revelatory experience of God from the charges of epistemological agnosticism. An epistemological agnosticism with regard to the human experience of God would say that all knowledge of God outside revelation is invalid, and as such it is human projection. Such epistemological agnosticism however cannot escape, in turn, the charge of subjectivism from the quarter of science. For, on the basis of an epistemological realism, the natural and social sciences can only pass the judgment of subjectivism on this special kind of human experience so exempt from the normal ways of human knowledge and so exempt from the criticism to which all other human knowledge is subjected. Niebuhr's strong sense of the reality of God, independent of human experience, led him to reject the epistemological view which said that men do not experience God except in a miraculous way. In order to keep the traditional orthodox teaching on God's sovereignty and reality independent of human experience from charges of subjectivism, he said there is a human experience of God which can bear the normal critique to which all human experience is subjected by science. In Niebuhr's theological use of realism, men do experience God as the reality which exists independently of human experience and, at the same time, experience him as that reality which is integral to the constitution of that which makes humans distinctive from other beings. In other words, for Niebuhr, without an experience of God which is neither a mere psychological projection nor a miraculous event man is not fully human.

Our use of the word "orthodox" in the title of this dissertation and in the framing of the thesis is not meant in an apologetic or polemic sense. By "orthodox Christianity" we mean the generally accepted dogmatic formulations of the early ecumenical councils and the general use of sacraments and proclamation of Scripture in worship services. Our use of the word "orthodox" therefore has ecumenical overtones, viz., it refers to those dogmas and practices common to all Christians regardless of their denominations. With regard to the doctrine of God, we mean the orthodox Christian teaching that God is the Creator and Savior of everything and everybody and that he is all-powerful and all-good.

Our thesis is that H. Richard Niebuhr developed a type of epistemological realism, which we will call critical realism, as a way of dealing with this human experience of God in such a way that the independent existence of God is not diminished while, at the same time, the experience of this divine reality is not exempt from the scientific analyses of human experience found in the natural and social sciences. It must be noted at the outset that the experience of God, in Niebuhr's analysis of it, always happens in a faith context; and for Niebuhr his faith-relation occurred within Christianity. Yet Niebuhr's analysis of faith as trust and loyalty, and not just as assent to a dogmatic statement, indicates his unique contribution to epistemological realism, viz., that the fiduciary character of the human self is broader than a creedal formulation such as is found in Christianity, and that it is, in fact, part of the very process in which humans know. Niebuhr therefore used epistemological realism to develop a theological position about God and man rather than to expound a philosophical or metaphysical theory about divinity, but he did so in such a way that indicates his sympathy for some of the concerns of liberal theology, especially American liberal theology. With his understanding of realism Niebuhr propounded an experiential view of God sympathetic to liberal theology. Yet, it will become apparent in this study that Niebuhr's pursuit of a realist epistemology and his subsequent development of it in a theological rather than a metaphysical way is indicative of the mediating position of Niebuhr's theology rather than a statement of its liberal character.

This mediating position can be most broadly characterized as an attempt to reconcile the inherited religious practice of Word and Sacrament found in the Christian tradition with the new and developing viewpoints of the natural sciences, of the social sciences, and of some of the philosophical presuppositions underlying these several sciences. The locus at which Niebuhr attempted this reconciliation is the problematic of a Sovereign God revealing himself in human experience. It is the problem which arises for the Christian tradition in the modern and contemporary eras as the problem of the transcendence and the immanence of God. In other words, it is the problem of how and in what ways can a God, who transcends the limits of human and cosmic reality, be said to be experienced in the world and in human history without resorting to some idea of a miraculous suspension of the natural and social processes of the world as we know them through the tested and tried methods of natural and social sciences.

Though Niebuhr's interest in and sympathy towards an experiential view of God aligns him with the European liberal theology, it is a secondary thesis of ours that Niebuhr's mediating position grew more directly out of his encounter with a realist attitude which he found in the thought of Macintosh. We certainly do not discount Niebuhr's reliance on and use of European theologians.[1]

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[1] H. Richard Niebuhr openly acknowledges his debt to Barth and Troeltsch: "Students of theology will recognize that Ernst Troeltsch and Karl Barth have also been my teachers, though only through their writings." The Meaning of Revelation (New York: The Macmillan Co., Macmillan Paperback edition, 1960), p. 11. (Hereafter abbreviated MR.) Niebuhr's own doctoral dissertation was on Ernst Troeltsch; "Ernst Troeltsch's Philosophy of Religion," Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1924. Hans Frei does an excellent analysis of the debt of Niebuhr to the thought of these two theological giants: Hans Frei, "Niebuhr's Theological Background," in Faith and Ethics: The Theology of H. Richard Niebuhr, ed. Paul Ramsey (New York: Harper & Row, Harper Torchbook, 1965), pp. 40-64. Libertus Hoedemaker's published dissertation is also very helpful in showing the relationship of Niebuhr to Barth and Troeltsch; The Theology of H. Richard Niebuhr (Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1970), pp.11-27.

Our interest however is to study more closely than has been done Niebuhr's relationship to the epistemological realism which he found in Macintosh.

In part, our interest in Niebuhr's realist position grew out of a desire to see Niebuhr in relation to the thought of American religious thinkers. Though Niebuhr drew from the thought of many men who are American, we have centered on Macintosh because, as we shall see, he was the one with whom Niebuhr had to come to grips in formulating his own realism.[1] Whether or not the theological use to which Niebuhr put his realism can be said to be distinctively American is not part of our thesis. To define a theological position which is uniquely American as opposed, for example, to one which is European is a vast project. We do think however that an understanding of how Niebuhr came to his realist position can in some small way help in delineating the parameters of an American theological perspective.

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[1] Some other American thinkers from whom Niebuhr draws are Jonathan Edwards, Horace Bushnell, Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, Josiah Royce, and George Herbert Mead. Several studies on Niebuhr's thought deal with his relationship to American religious thinkers. See Hoedemaker, pp. 1-11, 33-38. The two most explicitly concerned with the American background of Niebuhr's thought are: Leo Sandon, Jr., "H. Richard Niebuhr's Interpretation of the American Theological Tradition," Ph.D. dissertation, Boston University, 1971, and W. Hal Furr, "An Introduction to the Thought of H. Richard Niebuhr," Ph.D. dissertation, Temple University, 1971. A more specialized treatment of Niebuhr in relation to other American thinkers is Thomas Ray McFaul, "A Comparison of the Ethics of H. Richard Niebuhr and Reinhold Niebuhr," Ph.D. dissertation, Boston University, 1972. Jerry Folk shows the relation of the Social Gospel to Niebuhr; see "The Theological Development of Helmut Richard Niebuhr from 1920-1960," inaugural dissertation, Tübingen, 1970.

As we shall see, Niebuhr's experiential view of theology distinguished him, on the one hand, from the neo-orthodox position of Karl Barth and, on the other hand, from the empirical theologies of D. C. Macintosh and H. N. Wieman. To understand why Niebuhr distinguished himself both from a neo-orthodox stance and from a liberal theological stance, it is important to realize that Niebuhr's mediating position was not one of mediation between liberal theology, whether European or American, and neo-orthodoxy. The mediating function which Niebuhr derived from his realism is that which helped him to reconcile the differences and conflicts that have arisen between the inherited tradition of the Christian churches and the emerging and changing attitudes to dogmas, moral prescriptions, and established ways of worshipping brought about by the natural and social sciences.

It is important for us to recognize at the outset of this study that a corollary to Niebuhr's experiential understanding of theology is the understanding that theology is cultural. For Niebuhr the cultural base of his theology was twofold, namely, its foundation in the Christian, ecclesial setting and its location in the tradition of American religious thought. As part of an American religious tradition Niebuhr saw his experiential understanding of theology as an attempt to come to grips with some of the issues which a realist approach to theology, whether the empirical theology of Macintosh or the naturalist theology of Wieman, presented to traditional Christian teaching. As part of an ecclesial tradition Niebuhr modified what he learned from a realist approach to theology by comparing it with the Christian tradition. The Christian, ecclesial context for Niebuhr was a matter of a confessional stance. His interest in developing an epistemological analysis of that confessional stance was not an apologetic defense of the Christian faith. It was meant to be a deeper understanding of that faith--a fides quaerens intellectum--while, at the same time, a reconciling of that faith with certain views of the natural and social sciences by demonstrating the fiduciary character of all human knowing.

To appreciate the significance of Niebuhr's binding himself to an ecclesial tradition, a distinction between theology and religious thought must be made. A theologian is distinguished from a philosopher of religion in the way he considers the historical tradition within which he works normative and binding on him. A philosopher of religion does his analysis within a historical tradition, whose system of critique he considers incumbent upon him to follow. His allegiance to this system is as confessional as the theologian's to his tradition. Though the philosopher's allegiance can be changed by logical demonstration or new evidence, it is still a confessional stance. The theologian's commitment to his tradition is not any more confessional than that of the philosopher of religion. It is only different. For Niebuhr, whether or not the two points of view can be reconciled depends first of all on both recognizing the fiduciary character of knowledge. Only after doing this can some judgment be made on which faith-commitment is more inclusive and capable of providing a paradigm which can bring about unity among several lesser commitments.

The markedly confessional stance of Niebuhr is apparent throughout all his works. As he said in his later years:

> . . . I call myself a Christian because my relation to God has been, so far as I can see, deeply conditioned by this presence of Jesus Christ in my history and in our history. In one sense I must call myself a Christian in the same way that I call myself a twentieth-century man. To be a Christian is simply part of my fate, as it is the fate of another to be a Muslim or a Jew. In this sense a very large part of mankind is today Christian; it has come under the influence of Jesus Christ so that even its Judaism and Mohammedanism bears witness to the fact that Jesus Christ has been among us. But I call myself a Christian more because I have both accepted this fateful fact and because I identify myself with what I understand to be the cause of Jesus Christ. That cause I designate simply as the reconciliation of man to God.[1]

This confessional stance then colors Niebuhr's use of epistemological realism in his theology. So when, for example, he drew on philosophical views of value and ethics, he did so as one committed to a believing community. Niebuhr developed a value analysis of contemporary life as sophisticated and penetrating as many offered by philosophers of religion and by philosophers of value, but he did so as one committed to the tradition of the ecclesial faith as it manifests itself in various Christian churches. He let himself be limited by a magisterial tradition, that is, by an ecclesial principle of authority known in Roman Catholic circles as magisterium and in the Protestant Churches as the Biblical Word or Ordinance;

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[1] H. Richard Niebuhr, The Responsible Self: An Essay in Christian Moral Philosophy (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 43. (Hereafter abbreviated RS.)

but he did so in a way cognizant of the issues which confront any person, whether Christian or not, in today's world.[1] He had not, however, afforded himself the respite from the muddle of practical church life which the person in philosophy of religion or in philosophy of ethics has obtained in being not so nearly bound by a magisterial tradition, if by any at all. That Niebuhr knew the prejudicial implications of ecclesial magisterium is amply witnessed in his writings, beginning with The Social Sources of Denominationalism.[2] But then he would ask the philosopher of religion and the philosopher of ethics to know the limitations out of which they also begin.

The appeal of Niebuhr's theological thought is to the believing Christian who attempts to live out his faith in the context of today's world made sophisticated by the natural and social sciences. Unlike liberal theology, the theology of Niebuhr reflects a concern for a normative tradition. Unlike fundamentalistic authoritarian Christianity, whether biblical or doctrinal, the theology of Niebuhr reflects an awareness of how the normative tradition changes as it is lived out in different contexts. In Roman Catholic circles, much of Niebuhr's mediating position would be seen as part of the problematic issue called the development of doctrine. As a Protestant, however, Niebuhr was not bothered by authoritarian uses of the church tradition as has been evident in Roman Catholicism; but insofar as Niebuhr heeded the need for a normative tradition, he offered some important insights into the question of an official teaching and its interpretation in changing contexts--a question of the greatest ecumenical importance among all Christians, whether Catholic, Protestant, or Orthodox.

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[1] Daniel Day Williams also saw how Niebuhr based his theology in the concrete ecclesial setting: "But no matter where the thread of the problem led, for Dr. Niebuhr every theological issue, and indeed every human question, arose in a concrete human community and came back to decisions and loyalties that shape the common life" (pp. 209-210). "Dr. Niebuhr believed theology ought always to begin with the situation at hand. That situation is personal and communal. We stand in a community of faith, living in this history, involved with these men in their loyalties, sufferings, hopes and failures. This is where we should begin with the theological task" (pp. 210-211). Daniel Day Williams, "A Personal and Theological Memoir," Christianity and Crisis, 33 (1963).

[2] (Cleveland: The World Publishing Co., Living Age Book, Meridian Books, 1957). (Hereafter abbreviated SSD.)

A further appeal of Niebuhr's theological thought for the believing Christian is that it offers a non-triumphal way of living the Christian life among non-Christians. His theological perspective, on the one hand, invites dialogue with the other great world religions, with the non-theistic religious attitudes of humanism and with communism while, on the other hand, it enables the Christian believer to engage in this dialogue without compromising himself. Niebuhr's theology indicates a way in which one can believe in dogmas without being dogmatic and a way in which one can develop a system of Christian doctrine without being doctrinaire.

II. The Epistemological Climate of Early Twentieth Century America

The appellation "critical realism" which Niebuhr, on occasion, gave to his epistemological view comes from a context much larger than the thought of H. Richard Niebuhr. "Critical realism" is the name given to the epistemological view held by a group of American philosophers in the early twentieth century who collaborated in a book of essays on realism so as to distinguish themselves from another group of philosophers who propounded a realist view known as "new realism." Since Niebuhr's interest in epistemological realism was not to propound a general view of knowledge but rather to determine a realist view of religious experience, his use of the term "critical realism" was not intended to indicate his preference for critical realism as opposed to new realism. Though he did refer to the movement known as critical realism, he indicated no allegiance to it as a philosophical movement.[1] Rather, his use of the term, critical realism, indicated his realist position on religious experience, peculiar to himself. It is this unique usage of the term, critical realism, which we will use in this dissertation to designate H. Richard Niebuhr's experiential view of God.

The larger historical context of epistemological realism, represented by the controversy between new realism and critical realism, was mediated to Niebuhr through the influence of his doctoral father, D. C. Macintosh. Macintosh was deeply involved in the epistemological question and wrote a book on the general problem of knowledge as well as several books on religious knowledge.[1] In these writings Macintosh developed his own realist position which he clearly distinguished from new realism and from critical realism.

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[1] H. Richard Niebuhr, "Religious Realism and the Twentieth Century," in Religious Realism, edited by D. C. Macintosh (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1931), pp. 417-18.

To understand Niebuhr's own appropriation of an epistemological realism for his theological purposes, a brief survey of the larger historical context of epistemological realism in America will now be given. We will then describe the theological use of realism at this time by comparing the views of D. C. Macintosh and H. N. Wieman, since they were, at this time, the theologians most explicitly concerned with developing an experiential approach to theology on a realist basis. They do differ however on their understandings of empirical theology. We offer a comparison between their experiential views of God as an overview of some theological appropriations of an epistemological realism in America into which H. Richard Niebuhr entered when he began his academic career as a theologian in 1919. Niebuhr drew heavily from Macintosh whereas he knew Wieman only peripherally. We will see, however, later on in the dissertation, how Niebuhr distinguished his mature concept of realism from Wieman.

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[1] See D. C. Macintosh, The Problem of Knowledge (New York, 1915); Theology as Empirical Science (New York, 1919); The Reasonableness of Christianity (New York, 1925); The Problem of Religious Knowledge (New York, 1940).

A. The Epistemological Embroglio of the 1910-1920's

At the turn of the twentieth century there arose on the philosophical horizon, especially in the United States,[1] a concerted effort on the part of many philosophers to oppose the doctrines of epistemological idealism, which said that the known or perceived object depends for its existence on the act of knowing and that the immediately perceived object is only a state of the perceiving mind. This effort, which came to be known as new realism, held the following cardinal tenets, to wit, that what the mind knows or perceives exists independently of the acts of knowing and perceiving and that the mind is selective of this independently existing reality and not constitutive or generative of it.

The new realist movement in America dates to the writings of William P. Montague and Ralph Barton Perry. They were joined by four other philosophers, E. B. Holt, Walter T. Marvin, Walter B. Pitkin and Edward G. Spaulding, in 1909; while at a Philosophical Association meeting they made six lists of doctrines later published as "The Program and First Platform of Six Realists."[2] From this manifesto grew a consensus among these men to oppose idealism, to encourage a new alliance between science and philosophy, and to develop an epistemological account which could explain the facts of relativity in the knowing process from a realist point of view. The result of their efforts was a cooperative volume which they published in 1912 as The New Realism: Cooperative Studies in Philosophy.

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[1] Forerunners of new realism in Europe were Franz Brentano and Alexius Meinong. In England, T. D. Nunn, Bertrand Russell, and G. E. Moore gave more explicit formulation to a new realist position. As a movement, however, new realism had its florescence in America. See The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, s.v. "New Realism," by Thomas Robischon, pp. 485-86.

[2] E. B. Holt et al., "The Program and First Platform of Six Realists," Journal of Philosophy 7 (1910): 393-401.

From the perspective of a history of philosophy, the opposition of new realism to idealism is only another chapter in the long epistemological debate which originated with the mind-matter dualism of René Descartes in the seventeenth century. Descartes said that what we know first of all and with the most certainty is our minds; we know matter only indirectly. Some philosophers since Descartes found it impossible to bridge the gap which he had proposed between mentality and a material reality, and so they turned to some form of subjectivism or idealism. New realism, in turn, arose as a reaction to idealism, to dualistic forms of realism, and to outmoded forms of realism related to common sense or naive realism.

A way of viewing the epistemological debate which Descartes started, as Charles Morris suggests, is to see the several rejections of the Cartesian world-view as a rejection of a substance-view of mind which separates reality into a material substance and a mental substance. The substance-view of mind is intricately bound up with this dualistic view of reality; and as the substance-view of mind declines, there is a growing acceptance of reality as a process and of mind as relational. Idealism, pragmatism, and realism can all find a common point in the acceptance of change and development which, in varying degrees in these separate viewpoints, replaces the classical notion of reality as substance with a notion of it as organized process.[1]

In Morris's opinion, the key to understanding idealism is the recognition of the fact that it arose in opposition to the mechanical-mathematical understanding of the Galilean-Cartesian-Newtonian world which was built on a mind-matter dualism; idealism is the attempt to restore man to his place of importance in the world.[2] By insisting on the inseparability of the world from mind, idealism totally rejected the dualistic view of reality, and by insisting on the uniqueness of man's most distinctive trait, his mind, idealism counteracted the mechanical-mathematical excesses of its time. Its solution was a monism of the idealist sort, viz., that all reality is mental. There is no reality existing independent of mind.

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[1] "For better or for worse, the notion of change and development expresses the dominant note of the present cultural epoch, a note epitomized in philosophy by the doctrine of emergent evolution in which idealism, pragmatism, and realism appear to find a convergent point. The modern attitude of relativism is but a corollary of the conviction that the very nature of things is dependent upon the conditions under which they happen, and that these conditions must be given a temporal date." Charles Morris, Six Theories of Mind (Chicago, 1932), p. 48.

[2] ". . . the historic task of idealism has been to vindicate after every great movement of science the status of human values, to resist the temptation to find reality at the simplest levels disclosed by the analytical intelligence, and to give to man a place of dignity in the cosmos." Ibid., p. 33.

Though idealistic monism is at the other extreme from realism, Morris sees it as a necessary historical antecedent of the realist views of the twentieth century. "In its revolt against an ontological separation of mind and nature and against the particular doctrine of representative knowledge which dualism presented, idealism is the precursor of the dominant philosophy of the twentieth century."[1]

New realism took the idealist monism and stood it on its head by expounding, in turn, a realist monism. Mind, for the new realists, is relational; it is not a characteristic of reality in isolation from the reacting organism. As such, the mind is not therefore constitutive of being. "Mind does not exist apart from things, events, or entities in relation, the things, events, or entities not being dependent upon this relation for their existence."[2] New realism argues that knowing and being are independent. Whereas in the idealist view, being is dependent on mind (internal relations) and therefore causally related to mind, new realism holds that there can be relations of independence (external relation) between knowing and being. Knowledge is a stimulus-response relation between knower and object; it is a one-on-one relation wherein the knower has no causal effect on the object. With this epistemological outlook comes the doctrine that the content of knowledge is numerically identical with the thing known.

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[1] Ibid., p. 77.

[2] Ibid., p. 139.

Thought and its object are numerically the same; there is no "mediate," psychic entity between the object and what is known.[1]

The movement known as new realism did not hold the stage for very long. Many philosophers found that new realism had minimized the role of mind in direct proportion to the way in which idealism had maximized the role of mind; and they also found that it was not adequate to explain error.[2] The critics of new realism pointed out that the reacting organism does intervene in the knowledge process in a much more active way than new realism would admit; and they also pointed out that on the new realist view, error and illusory experience had the same objectivity and reality as veridical experience--a fact which indicates the inability of new realism to adequately account for error.

The second major realist movement of the twentieth century which displaced new realism is critical realism. The movement took its name from the book title, Critical Realism, written by Roy Sellars in 1916. In 1920 a group of philosophers who shared Sellars's epistemological view published their own platform, or cooperative statement, on epistemology.[1]

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[1] "To an idealist, the mind envisaged by new realism must appear to be a very feeble and forlorn aspect of reality. While for the idealist, mind is creative and constitutive, for the new realist, mind, as a relation between neutral or physical events, can do nothing. As Laird suggests, for 'construction' the new realist substitutes 'finding.' While for idealism the object of knowledge cannot ultimately be severed from mind, for the new realist knowledge is an external relation in which the object known owes nothing to being known. Where idealism stresses the systematic unity of mind as a self-evolving universal, and is not free from the influence of substance modes of thought, the new realism so far considered states mind in terms of a class or grouping of contents, and replaces completely the logic of substance and attributes by the logic of relations." Ibid., pp. 138-39.

[2] "There does not seem to be 'enough mind' to account satisfactorily for givenness, knowledge, error, or to do justice to the systematic, constructive, and even 'creative' character of more complex forms of mental activity." Ibid., p. 144.

The critical realist is in accord with the new realist in opposing idealism and in upholding the reality of the physical world outside of human perception. The disagreement between the two realist positions is over the relation of the datum of knowledge to its object.[2] For the new realist there is a numerical identity between what is perceived and the independently existing reality. The critical realist opposes this identification of the datum of knowledge and the independently existing reality because the fact of error indicates that what is perceived is not an immediate intuition of the physical reality. The new realist, by identifying the immediate datum of knowledge with the physical object, has developed a theory of knowledge insufficient to explain certain facts about the knowledge process. The critical realist therefore replaces the new realist immediatism of a one-for-one identity between percept and object with a mediatism that allows a separate status to the datum of knowledge in the knowing process.[3]

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[1] Essays in Critical Realism: A Co-operative Study of the Problems of Knowledge by Durant Drake, Arthur O. Lovejoy, James B. Pratt, Arthur K. Rogers, George Santayana, Roy Wood Sellars, and C. A. Strong (London, 1920).

[2] For the special usage of the word "datum" by critical realism see p. 27, below.

[3] The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, s.v. "Critical Realism," by A. S. Ramspeger, p. 261.

In developing a vehicular theory of knowledge, the several philosophers who espouse critical realism have used various names, such as "the datum," "the essence," or "the character complex," to indicate the vehicle which mediates between the object and the subject in the knowing process. All these names point to the same concern which these philosophers have, viz., that the vehicles of knowledge are "distinct, numerically and in their being, from the external objects of which they are supposed to afford knowledge."[1] The datum which one finds in perception is not the object of perception but rather the means by which we perceive. In other words, there is a distinction between the datum and the objective reality.[2] On the basis of this distinction, critical realism is espousing a dualistic realism over against the monistic realism of new realism.[3] For critical realism, what is immediately experienced and intuited is the datum and what is known is the independently existing reality. This datum has a mental existence and is distinct from the object, a fact which explains why there is error at times; its mental existence is not had, however, outside the relationship between the knowing subject and the object known.

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[1] Arthur O. Lovejoy, Ch. II, "Pragmatism versus the Pragmatist," Essays in Critical Realism, p. 48.

[2] "The critical realist agrees with the idealist that the content is mental, but strikes his counter-blow by asserting that knowledge is a claim to know an object in terms of this content. The object is known but not intuited; the content is intuited but not known." Roy Wood Sellars, Ch. VI, "Knowledge and Its Categories," Essays in Critical Realism, p. 212.

[3] The use of the word dualism in the issue over realism needs clarification at this point. Dualism can be used, on the one hand, with an epistemological meaning and, on the other hand, with an ontological meaning. Epistemological dualism gives a "mental" reality to the conceptual vehicle, making it distinct from the objective reality. Ontological dualism makes a distinction between levels of being. One can therefore be an epistemological dualist while at the same time an ontological monist.

Critical realism agrees with idealism to the extent that it says the datum of knowledge is mental; but it differs radically from idealism in holding that this datum is that by which we know the independently existing reality. Critical realism agrees with new realism in holding to the independently existing reality outside human experience; but it differs from new realism in distinguishing between the datum of knowledge and the object of knowledge.

> Critical realism differs from naive realism in its denial that the physical thing is intuited. Knowledge for it involves the distinction between the content and the object of knowledge. Yet it agrees with naive realism in its belief that the physical thing is the direct object of knowledge. It is critical realism in that it appreciates the nature of knowledge more critically in the light of the act of knowledge and of the actual conditions of human knowledge. While, properly speaking, there is no trace of subjective idealism in critical realism, it does justice to that play of mental activity that modern logic and psychology stress. It is synoptic in a way that other epistemological systems cannot claim to be.[1]

Critical realism was not the only critic of new realism; nor did critical realism remain exempt from criticism from sources other than idealism or new realism. The functional, instrumental view of knowledge developed by John Dewey was in agreement with critical realism insofar as it stressed the point that a person does not immediately experience the object in the knowledge process. Dewey however could not accept the special mental status which critical realism gave to the mediating datum. Charles Morris, in explaining the difference between a critical realist view of mind and an objective relativist view of mind, which Morris presents as the view espoused by Dewey, indicates where the two differ and voices the concern that the psychophysical dualism of critical realism can give rise once again to a substance-view of reality which divides reality into matter and mind.

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[1] Sellars, p. 199.

> Does the recognition of the vehicular nature of knowledge, coupled with a just treatment of awareness, imply the position that the vehicle of knowledge is not part of nature, or at best only a constituent of the knowing subject? Does epistemological dualism or pluralism require a psychophysical dualism and furnish a refutation of the view that mentality is a functional rather than an intrinsic characteristic of some or all events? Here is the 'great divide' in contemporary philosophy. It is here that the alignment of new realism, objective realism, and pragmatism, on the one hand, and critical realism, on the other, takes place. Dewey, for instance, would deny the doctrine of immediate (non-mediated) knowledge, and yet would hold that the vehicle of knowledge is itself part of the same order of events that is the object of knowledge. Is this a possible position, or does the admission of an element of mediation in knowledge require the acceptance of an ontological dualism or perhaps a panpsychism? Does the attempt to get 'enough mind' to meet the difficulties of new realism require so much mind that psychism, partial or complete, is dragged back on the stage of thought? Here is a crucial issue.[1]

We shall now see how the objective relativist's difficulty with the special mental status which critical realism gives to the datum of knowledge is at the basis of the difference between the way Macintosh and Wieman use a realist epistemology in religious experience. Even though Macintosh criticizes the dualism of critical realism and develops his own position which he calls "critical monistic realism," he admits enough psychophysical dualism to make his view opposed to the radical empiricism of Wieman.

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[1] Morris, p. 214.

B. Comparison of Macintosh and Wieman and Their Theological Use of Realism

Both Macintosh and Wieman belong to the general tradition known as liberal Protestantism. To understand their place in the liberal tradition, it is important to recognize further that they represent a distinctive type of liberalism termed by one author as modernistic liberalism. Modernistic liberalism is distinguished from evangelical liberalism.[1] Whereas evangelical liberals adhered to some sense of a normative Christian tradition, which is evidenced by the Christocentricism of their theology, modernistic liberals have no real sense of continuing in the Christian historical tradition which is evidenced by the place they give Jesus in their theology. "Jesus was important [for modernistic liberals]--and even unique--because he illustruths and values which are universally relevant. However, these truths and values can be validated and even discovered apart from Jesus."[2] The source and the standard of religious truth for modernistic liberals was not any particular historic faith or revelation but rather human experience in general.

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[1] The distinction between the two types of liberalism is used by Kenneth Cauthen in his work The Impact of American Religious Liberalism (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), pp. 26-30. He acknowledges that distinction comes originally from Henry P. Van Dusen in Vitality of the Christian Tradition, ed. George F. Thomas (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1944), pp. 168-189.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 29.

As modernistic liberals, Macintosh and Wieman were both interested in human experience as revelatory of that which has the quality of deity. Another mutual concern of theirs was to ground this human experience of God in some kind of realism rather than in idealism. Since both disallowed any appeal to a normative tradition as a way of validating what is a true religious experience, they became concerned with finding a methodology which could provide this standard. They settled on the methodology of the empirical sciences which fitted their realist concern and which provided for them an adequate criterion of religious experience. If the methods of observation and experimentation, so productive for natural science, could be adapted for theology, there lay the way to restoring theology to a respectable position in the contemporary world. "By emphasizing the techniques of observation and testing, they attempted to arrive at a theoretical scheme which interprets the human experience of God. They were convinced that by such a method, and only in this way, it is possible to attain valid religious knowledge."[1]

Though Macintosh and Wieman can be classified as modernistic liberals, and though both are concerned with the experience of deity and empirical methods of establishing what God is, they differ considerably as to the meaning of this experience and the meaning and use of a method which is empirical. At the root of their divergence is the meaning of the word "experience." Anyone who makes experience the basis for interpreting reality can, in a general way, be said to be experiential, but in what ways can this experience be said to be empirical? And what is the meaning of the experience as it is used by different philosophers? When one attempts to answer that question, he finds out that experience is a "weasel word" and that the claims to be empirical, on the basis of the meaning of experience, vary as the understandings of what the word experience means vary.[1]

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[1] *Ibid*., p. 36.

To understand more clearly the differing views of experience to which Macintosh and Wieman hold, it is helpful to recall that both are espousing some kind of epistemological realism which they, in turn, use in a theological way. They do not differ in their affirmation of a reality existing independently of the human mind which, in the case of theology, is the affirmation of God's independent existence. But they do differ in the ways they interpret the meaning of mind and in the ways they explain how the mind knows. Macintosh's view of mind is bound up with his effort to distinguish himself from monistic realism which he equates with new realism and his efforts to distinguish himself from dualistic realism which he equates with critical realism. Macintosh calls his way "critical monistic realism."[1] Wieman's view of mind is bound up with the objective relativism espoused by John Dewey.[2]

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[1] "One might proffer the harmless definition that to be an empiricist is to be willing to turn from innate ideas and general principles and authoritarian doctrines to the instruction of experience. 'The instruction of experience!' Ah, yes. But what precisely is the instruction of experience? Negatively, empiricists are, I suppose, all akin: they have common foes and often embark coöperatively in campaigns against a priori judgments and transcendental claims. But positively they often seem pretty much at odds in their basic contentions. Experience, in the well-known phrase of Professor Ralph B. Perry, is a 'weasel word.'" Sterling P. Lamprecht, Empiricism and Natural Knowledge (Howison Lecture for 1938), University of California Publications in Philosophy, volume 16, no. 4 (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1940), p. 71.

In The Problem of Knowledge, Macintosh gives extensive treatment to dualistic realism, monistic idealism, and dualistic idealism, and he then defines his own position over against these epistemological theories by incorporating elements from them in his own theory. From one perspective Macintosh's critical monistic realism can be seen as an attempt to combine the benefits of critical realism with new realism.[3] Macintosh is similar to the critical realist in that he believes that there is some qualitative difference between percept and object. Yet he cannot grant an absolute duality between the two which would always make the percept a psychic reality. With the new realist he affirms an identity between percept and object which allows some kind of immediate knowledge of reality. Macintosh sees his critical monistic realism as a defense of epistemological monism and critical realism.

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[1] D. C. Macintosh, The Problem of Knowledge, pp. 13; 310-33.

[2] The term objective relativism comes from Charles Morris where he uses it to explain Dewey's functional view of mind; see Six Theories of Mind. We use it here to describe Wieman's epistemological view.

[3] "We seem driven therefore to seek another point of view, from which we shall be able to avoid the fallacies, the subjectivisms, and abstractionisms of idealism in its various forms and the fallacies and final agnosticism of dualism, without falling into the unwarranted dogmatism and insoluble puzzles of neo-realism." Macintosh, The Problem of Knowledge, p. 310.

> By this [critical monistic realism] is meant the doctrine that the object perceived is existentially, or numerically, identical with the real object at the moment of perception, although the real object may have qualities that are not perceived at that moment; and also that this same object may exist when unperceived, although not necessarily with all the qualities which it possesses when perceived.[1]

In other words, Macintosh recognizes both the fact that the reality independently existing is larger than human experience of it and the fact that the human mind can condition the nature of the object known so that some of the qualities it predicates of the object may not belong to that object in its independent existence. Yet he asserts there is enough existential identity between percept and object to warrant our saying that we have known that reality directly.

> If, then, we define knowledge as certainty of the nature of reality, either in its immediate givenness or in true judgments, sufficient for all proper practical purposes, it will be readily apparent that if there is immediate knowledge of independent reality in normal perception, there may also be mediate knowledge of independent reality through the processes of thought, and that the immediate knowledge has made the mediate knowledge possible.[2]

Though Macintosh affirms some identity between percept and object, and though he sees knowledge as a relation between subject and object, he still holds to an existent in the knowing process which is a psychical or mental reality. In the language of Charles Morris, Macintosh's view of mind propounds a "substance-view" of mind which leads to a body-soul dualism. Consciousness, or mind, for Macintosh is "a unique productive or creative activity of a non-physical subject."[1] Such a view of mind will lead Macintosh in his development of an empirical theology to affirm the immortality of the soul and to predicate personality of God as pragmatically necessary for faith. By affirming a spiritual status for the soul and by predicating these spiritual qualities of God, Macintosh has retained a notion of transcendence for God which puts God in some way beyond human experience.[2] And though he thinks that in time we may even penetrate the transcendence of God, the way in which he develops a theoretical explanation of what God is, through a process of pragmatic inference and surmise, indicates Macintosh's awareness that there is a whole area in God which we do not yet experience.[3]

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[1] Ibid., pp. 310-311. See also Reasonableness of Christianity, p. 198.

[2] Ibid., pp. 311.

When Macintosh claims that he is doing his theology in an empirical fashion, he bases his claim on particular religious experience wherein humans are said to have some direct experience of God. This experience, which is specifically religious, Macintosh equates, on the one hand, with that which produces moral value in man and, on the other hand, with the numinous experience which people have when they say they experience God. Macintosh calls the former an objective account of the religious experience and the latter a subjective account of it.[1] He claims his theology is empirical because it is based on the practical certainty that God exists and that we experience him in value-activity; there are, however, qualities of God which we do not experience but which we can surmise.

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[1] Ibid., p. 316.

[2] "Not all that enters into direct religious experience is to be regarded as belonging to the divine reality in its independent existence, nor is what is directly experienced of the divine to be taken as all there is of the divine in reality." Macintosh, The Problem of Religious Knowledge, p. 178.

[3] Below we will see in greater detail how he develops his theoretic view of God which he claims is empirically based. The essence of what he does is contained in the catch-phrase of his: "We have the moral right to believe as we must in order to live as we ought." Found in the dialogue between H. N. Wieman, D. C. Macintosh, and M. C. Otto, Is There a God: A Conversation (Chicago, 1932), p. 140.

Wieman's understanding of empirical is much more than the affirmation that we have experienced the independently existing reality which is God. His affirmation is that only that which is experienced or experienceable is part of knowledge. In this he is a radical empiricist. God then is in no way separate from experience; he is not transcendent. This latter view reflects Wieman's naturalist addition to his radical empiricism; as a naturalist he admits of no supernatural reality existing beyond natural reality.

The realist view which lies behind Wieman's claim, that God can only be that which is experienced, is objective relativism. As a relational view of the knowing process, objective relativism is against psychophysical dualism which separates reality into matter and mind; it is also against the subjectivism of idealism. The unique emphasis which objective relativism gives to a realist view of knowledge can be seen in the ways in which objective relativism compares with the realist views of new realism and critical realism.

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[1] Maçintosh, The Problem of Religious Knowledge, pp. 170-76.

Unlike the new realist, the objective relativist holds to a generative notion of what is given in the relationship between the object and the perceiving organism. "Knowing is an activity instrumental to the satisfaction of organic needs and interest. In virtue of the effects of objects upon the organism and the activity of the organism itself, experience arises, events appear. . . . These given events are regarded as dependent upon the organism for their existence as well as their appearance."[1] It is through the activity of the organism that changes come about and that new features arise in the world which would not have happened in the absence of the organism. There is therefore some kind of mediation between the organism and the object known; what is given in this mediation is the relation of the object existing prior to the relation and the organic activity. The givenness is not knowledge; knowledge is the reflective process of the organism used in solving problems for the organic activity.

Unlike the critical realist, and unlike the critical monistic realism of Macintosh, objective relativism does not grant a mental or spiritual status to this givenness which depends on the organism for its existence. Objective relativism is set against any dualism which a substance-view of mind creates between matter and mind. For the objective relativist, mind or mentality is physical; what is given in the relationship between the organism and the object is not a psychical reality. In the objective relativist's view, mentality does not separate the mind from the physical; ". . . mentality is an adjective applied to a thing in virtue of its symbolic functioning, and that neither the thing meant, nor the thing signifying, nor the 'meaning' itself is a mental existence."[1]

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[1] Morris, p. 302.

The realism of the objective relativist lies in his affirmation that the givenness of experience can be a character of external objects. Although certain given events of experience are "emergent upon and exist only in the presence of a percipient organism, these events are objective in the sense of being existential attributes of the physical object attended to."[2] Objective relativism, on the one hand, claims that some given events are characters of objects external to the organism, while, on the other hand, it claims some given events, although physical, are characters of the organism—a fact which explains error. Objective relativism does not make the claim, as new realism does, that every given event is a character of the object other than the subject.[3] Objective relativism does combine new realism's emphasis on the existential givenness of the physical with the emphasis in critical realism on mediation in the knowledge process.

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[1] *Ibid*., p. 261 [2] *Ibid*., p.253. [3] *Ibid*., pp. 252-53.

> At the same time, while keeping the doctrine of the existential givenness of nature, pragmatism, in the development of the functional note [of the knowing process], has come to insist that all knowledge requires mediation. The new realist affirmed epistemological monism and existential givenness, and the critical realist denied these doctrines; the pragmatic position may be regarded as denying epistemological monism and affirming an existential givenness of physical nature. Such a mediating position opens the possibility of avoiding the new realist's difficulty with error and the critical realist's difficulty with knowledge--the factor of mediation applying to the first, the factor of existential givenness to the latter. The conception of mentality as a function within the life-process provides an opportunity to do justice to the active and systematic features of mind while admitting with the realist that mind operates within a larger non-mental setting.[1]

Wieman's affirmation of an objective relativist view can be seen both in his theological use of its realism and his affirmation of its insistence that all reality is physical, that is, part of the natural processes capable of being subjected to empirical verification used in the natural and social sciences. Both of these views, viz., a realist view and a radical empiricist view, cannot be separated in Wieman's use of them in his theology. For though God, in Wieman's view, is superhuman in that he is not to be equated with any human perception, whether individual or communal, God is not transempirical; no part of God is therefore transcendent or in a supernatural realm impenetrable by the human organism. We need now to see in more detail Wieman's realism and Wieman's radical empiricism in his theology.

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 274-75.

Wieman's theological realism is seen not only in his opposition to idealism but also in his rejection of subjectivist interpretations of the religious experience which psychologized away the objective reality of God and his rejection of the religious humanism as exemplified by John Dewey. Wieman's interest in the experience of God was not the experiencing but what is experienced. He was not interested in determining those special, inner experiences which would be revelatory of God. And though in his earlier writings he speaks of a mystical experience of God, he did not exempt it from empirical testing; after 1930 he spoke very little of a mystical experience.[1] Wieman's interest in the object of the religious experience, rather than in the subject, is the reason for his divergence from the religious humanism of Dewey. For the religious humanist, God was not an object of experience, but rather he was a symbol representing an ideal of the universe or an activity which sustains the life of the world. "From these points of view, God is seen to be more a symbolical representation of activities that transpire, a conceptual, though not a perceptual reality. In Wieman's thought, God is clearly an object of immediate experience, perceived as well as conceived. Thus he speaks of God as a process, a movement, a growth, that operates in our midst, shaping and fulfilling the good."[2]

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[1] Cauthen, p. 193.

[2] Bernard Meland's comment on Wieman's theology in, H. N. Wieman and B. E. Meland, American Philosophies of Religion (Chicago, 1936), p. 295.

God then is an objective reality which is perceived by men, but he is not to be equated with any particular perception. The task of theology is to find that object in experience which is God and then to develop the nature of this object. The objective reality, which is God, is found in the experience of value; broadly defined, Wieman's God is that which is supremely worthful for all mankind. "Whatever else the word God may mean, it is a term used to designate that something upon which human life is most dependent for its security, welfare, and increasing abundance."[1] The realist emphasis in this view is seen in the fact that Deity is not to be equated with any human view of it or experience of it. It is that objective reality which improves the quality of life and brings about growth of meaning in the world.

> This growth of meaning in the world is superhuman. Superhuman does not mean supernatural. Neither does it mean something outside of human life, for humans can never experience or know anything that is wholly outside their living. Growth of meaning can occur only in and with human experience. Growth of meaning must always appropriate the materials of human life.[2]

With this last quotation, we see how integral Wieman's radical empiricism is part of his realist insistence on God as an objective factor not to be equated with human perception of it. We now turn to examine in greater detail the implications of Wieman's radical empiricism for his theology. Though,

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[1] H. N. Wieman, Religious Experience and Scientific Method (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1926; reprinted, Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1970), p. 9.

[2] H. N. Wieman and Regina Wescott Wieman, Normative Psychology of Religion (New York, 1935), p. 252.

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in Wieman's view, God is superhuman, he is not transempirical. In other words, God is on the same level of existence as other processes of nature. Wieman therefore finds all views which exempt God from the experiential context as unconvincing to the scientific mind; any view of transcendence, which places God outside of relationship with the organisms of nature, can only be held on the basis of authoritarianism and dogmatic assertion.

Wieman therefore discounts as irrelevant any notion of a normative tradition based on revelation, or any claim on the part of individuals to have experienced God mystically; for both of these views depend on some mysterious faculty of discernment which exempts the experience of God from scientific criticism.

> These mysterious faculties of discernment have long since been regarded as mythical by psychology and epistemology so far as all ordinary cognition is concerned. To cling still to such a view with respect to discernment of God is to put the knowledge of God outside the field of scientific knowledge, where it can be neither examined or tested.[1]

On the basis of his radical empiricism and his naturalist view of God, Wieman asserts that humans do have a sense perception of God. In answer to the question, "Does God affect our senses," Wieman writes that any object which sustains human life must affect our senses.

> Hence God is an object to be perceived through sense experience. We do not mean that he must necessarily have a certain spatial magnitude. We do not mean that

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[1] Wieman, Religious Experience and Scientific Method, p. 22.

> we must be able to rub our hands against him any more than we can rub our hands against an atom or one of the remote stars. But we do mean that there must be ways of apprehending sense experience which would reveal to a competent observer the presence and character of that Something upon which human life is ultimately dependent for its maximum security and abundance. When this way of apprehending becomes established as a form of habitual reaction rendered accurate through experimental test, we perceive God.[1]

As an objective relativist, Wieman recognizes that human perception of the physical reality is mediated; in terms of God, when we are looking for the reality which produces human good we must subject our perception and our conceptualization on this perception to the careful scrutiny of scientific verification. Wieman realizes that in attempting to locate our experience of God and to interpret it there will be many inadequate answers given and that no particular answer will ever exhaust the reality of God. For this reason there is a note of tentativeness in Wieman; he gives no final definition of God. In this Wieman is close to the method of science which remains open to new interpretations in view of the empirical evidence.

We have seen in this section two ways in which a realist epistemology can be appropriated by theology. Though Macintosh and Wieman differ greatly, both have a common aim in attempting to speak theologically in a way comprehensible to the scientific mentality. They represent part of the theological climate in which H. Richard Niebuhr developed his own realist position in a theological way. We now proceed to show how Niebuhr constructed his realist theology.

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[1] H. N. Wieman, The Wrestle of Religion with Truth (New York, 1927), pp. 94-95

III. Structure of Dissertation

In explaining how H. Richard Niebuhr came to his realist view of God and the ways in which he used the experiential view of God which arise out of his theological use of epistemological realism, we have divided the dissertation into two parts. The first part is an analysis of H. Richard Niebuhr's writings from 1920-1937 which will show how Niebuhr came to his mature expression of a doctrine of God in a realist way. The second part of the dissertation will develop several topics which are found in the writings of Niebuhr after the 1930's and which show how Niebuhr used his realism in these areas of his thought.

The division of the dissertation into two parts reflects another secondary thesis of ours, namely, that by 1932 Niebuhr's experiential doctrine of God, developed through a theological use of epistemological realism, had reached its mature formulation. From that time on, the ways in which he speaks of the experience of God are only elaborations of what he has stated in 1932. In Part One we will use an analytic methodology as well as a historical methodology to show how Niebuhr gradually came to his mature expression of his theological realism in 1932.

In Part Two we will show how Niebuhr used his mature understanding of theological realism as the basis for his doctrine of faith, his understanding of relationality, and his theory of value. We have chosen these three areas because they all are intimately involved with Niebuhr's experiential view of

God. In the second part we will not trace the historical development of these topics and the nuances of meaning Niebuhr gave to them in relation to the cultural changes taking place in the socio-politico-economic sphere. Our concern is to see them as part of the internal consistency of Niebuhr's thought and how they are part of the mature expression of Niebuhr's thought.

PART ONE

H. RICHARD NIEBUHR'S DOCTRINE OF GOD AND RELIGIOUS REALISM

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CHAPTER TWO

THE GRADUAL DEVELOPMENT OF REALIST VIEW IN NIEBUHR'S EARLY THOUGHT

In 1931 H. Richard Niebuhr introduced a phrase in his writings which could be used as a catch-phrase for his theological posture at this time and for the years to come; the phrase was "critical realism."[1] He used this appellation to indicate some of the then current theological and philosophical views on religion which were critical of optimistic claims, made by some scientists and by some theologians and philosophers, about mankind's ability to better itself inevitably. He also used it to indicate theological and philosophical views which were opposed to an idealistic solution to the epistemological problem in religious experience. The phrase "critical realism" however has peculiar significance for Niebuhr's thought, for it represents his attempt to synthesize what, on the one hand, he has learned from liberal theology and epistemological realism, with what, on the other hand, he has learned from crisis theology and from orthodox Christian theology. In particular, Niebuhr used the phrase in connection with his doctrine of God's sovereignty.

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[1] The first instance of the phrase "critical realism" appears in the unpublished manuscript, "Theology in a Time of Disillusionment," Alumni lecture given at Yale in 1931: "And so by confronting our disillusionment in theology and preaching in the spirit of a critical realism which will be no less critical than realistic and no less realistic than critical--both with respect to man and in regard to God--it may be that we can attain to a more adequate definition for our time of the eternal revelation in time and of our urgent task as those who face not only eternity but also their own time" (p. 22). In an article written in 1930 Niebuhr describes the antithesis between German Christianity and American Christianity as one of opposition between German "theology" and American "ethics," or as one of opposition between German "theocentrism" and American "anthropocentrism." He offers his conception of critical realism as the way of synthesizing German and American religious thought; he does not use the term "critical realism" in this article but rather refers to it as "realism" or "religious realism." H. Richard Niebuhr, "Can German and American Christians Understand Each Other," The Christian Century 47 (1930): 415. Niebuhr gives a more detailed analysis of the meaning of critical realism in "Religious Realism and the Twentieth Century," in Religious Realism, edited by D. C. Macintosh (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1931), pp. 413-28; we will consider this article in detail below.

The ways in which Niebuhr combined the experiential modes of thought of liberal theology with neo-orthodox modes of thought indicates Niebuhr's relationship to American religious thought. For in combining the two, Niebuhr identified the former with American religious thinkers and the latter with the European theologians Barth and Tillich. And he merged these two strains of thought with the awareness of a universal Christian tradition which is broader than the European and American influences on it and which at the same time includes each strain of thought as part of the universal tradition. In intermingling the insights of what he learned from religious realism with neo-orthodoxy and orthodox Christian theology, it seems that Niebuhr, in addition to developing an experiential view of God, was attempting to point out the significance which American religious thought had as part of the universal Christian tradition.[1] For Niebuhr, the special force which American religious thought contributed to the universal Christian tradition is seen in the ways he related an experiential view of God's sovereignty to the doctrine of God held in the universal Christian tradition.

In tracing the ways Niebuhr came to his understanding of realism, we will use 1930 as the turning point in the development of Niebuhr's thought on God. Niebuhr himself indicated that this was the time of decisive importance in the mature formulation of his doctrine of God.

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[1] Whether or not Niebuhr at this time was attempting in a self-reflective way to show the American quality of the universal Christian tradition is not clearly indicated. Certainly he was conscious of the sources he was using out of the American tradition. Later on he clearly indicates the desirability of a self-reflective attempt on the part of the believer to understand the relation between the universal Christian tradition and the cultural embodiment that tradition takes: ". . . although the gospel is supercultural neither evangelist nor evangelized can separate themselves from their culture. . . . It [the problem of relation between gospel and culture] must be solved to a larger extent by the evangelist's recognition of the limitations and relativity of his culture and of the ability of the language, concepts, mores of the evangelized to become containers of the meaning of the gospel. . . . As a theologian he will need to be a philosopher--an Aristotelian in medieval Europe, a neo-Kantian in Germany, an empiricist in America--and as a gospel theologian he will need to repent of his philosophy, knowing that it is a vessel only and not the only possible vessel. His philosophy is a tool by means of which he seeks to say what his philosophy cannot contain and the philosophy of the new nation or class is an instrument which must be used to express what does not lie in its province to express. What Augustine did with Platonism and Thomas with Aristotelianism the evangelistic theologian will need to do over and over again with the philosophies of the modern West and East. Thus culture will not be used as a substitute for the gospel but as a means for its proclamation." H. Richard Niebuhr, "The Christian Evangel and Social Culture," Religion in Life 8 (1939): 47-48.

> So far as I see it my history has been about as follows: The '30s were for me as for many of my generation in the church the decisive period in the formation of basic personal convictions and in the establishment of theological formulations of those convictions. The fundamental certainty given to me then (sad to say, not in such a way that my unconscious as well as conscious mind has been wholly permeated by it) was that of God's sovereignty.[1]

1930 was also the time when Niebuhr began to use the term "realism" as a way of expressing his conception of God.

In the quotation just cited Niebuhr carefully distinguished between his "personal conviction" of God's sovereignty and his "theological formulation" of the meaning of God's sovereignty. In making such a distinction, Niebuhr indicated that at this time there was a moment of deep personal awareness of the sovereignty of God, a moment of decisive importance in his life. This time is like a moment of conversion after which all that has gone before in a person's life assumes a new meaning and freshness.

Niebuhr, it seems, connected the shift in his thought with this experience of deep conviction. The cause for the shift in his thought was not solely nor primarily intellectual; it was also experiential. He indicated, in an article in which he reflected on his past thought, that such an interpretation of the shift in his thought is correct.

> To write a wholly honest account of my ways of thinking would require a more personal confession than is fitting in public discourse. For I suppose that no matter how

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[1] HRN, "Reformation: Continuing Imperative," p. 248.

> much all of us work out our thoughts about God and man, life and death, sorrow and joy, in response to common and public events, it is in every case the highly personal, not to say private, experiences that most immediately affect the basic form and formulations of our faith.

He also indicated how carefully he guarded his own private life: "About such things I neither ought nor want to write."[1]

The word "conversion" may not best describe this moment in Niebuhr's life. Conversion has overtones of a highly emotional character, connoting an abrupt change in the behavior of the individual experiencing the conversion. A time of "transformation" is more descriptive of the experience we see behind the shift in Niebuhr's thought.[2] The word "transformation" suggests a gradual process of change as well as a continuity in the thought and behavior of Niebuhr at this time.[3]

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[1] Ibid. While we can be in full symphathy with Niebuhr's reluctance to speak of his personal conversion, we also realize that his reflections on it would have counted among the great accounts of conversion such as that of Augustine of Hippo and Jonathan Edwards. Leo Sandon recounts the reflections of Sydney Ahlstrom on H. Richard Niebuhr's conversion: "Ahlstrom recalls that Niebuhr 'referred to his own personal Turmerlebnis of justification by faith' which occurred during the early thirties. When Ahlstrom asked him about this reference, Niebuhr indicated it referred to very personal events, deaths in the family, etc. This Turmerlebnis concept is very suggestive when one recalls that Niebuhr's problem was similar to Luther's 'How can I find a gracious God?', when Niebuhr spoke of moving 'from God the enemy to God the divine companion.' Sydney Ahlstrom, personal interview, July 9, 1967." Sandon, p. 25.

[2] Transformation becomes one of the types Niebuhr uses in Christ and Culture (New York: Harper & Row, Harper Torchbooks, 1956). (Hereafter abbreviated as CC.) He calls transformation "the conversionist solution" (p. 43). This conversionist outlook is characteristic of the style of much of Niebuhr's writing.

[3] One of the unpublished writings of Niebuhr indicates that Niebuhr was thinking in terms of a gradual transformation: "To speak of theology in a time of disillusionment may mean, therefore, that we can speak of a theology which does not ask us to adjust ourselves to some latest change in intellectual climate but of a theology which is forced by a change in the cultural outlook to turn away from the transient flux of things

The importance of the gradualness and the continuity in this time of change in Niebuhr's thought is seen in how he attempted to synthesize the insights he had learned from the American religious tradition about religious experience with those he learned from the orthodox Christian doctrine of God's sovereignty.[1] As a result of the moment of transformation in his life, Niebuhr did not repudiate an experiential notion of faith as part of the epistemological process common to all people. Niebuhr's acceptance of the experiential element in faith made him sympathetic to the American empirical tradition.

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to the permanent and the abiding. Such a theology may conceivably contain no more of the absolute in the last analysis than the theology which a period of optimism and progress produces, but it cannot help but contain elements overlooked in times of enjoyment. Like religion in the hour of need so theology in a time of disillusionment contains an urgency and a reality which appears to be lacking in softer hours with their easier faith and their less urgent demand for reality." HRN, "Theology in a Time of Disillusionment," pp. 1-2. Though the quotation is written in impersonal terms, it seems that Niebuhr drew on his own personal experience when writing about disillusionment.

[1] I have chosen the word "orthodox" rather than neo-orthodox to characterize Niebuhr's theological position. It seems that Niebuhr's insistence that his theological language is confessional indicates that he draws first of all and primarily on an ecclesial, magisterial tradition rather than on any theologian in particular. With reference to his doctrine of God, he draws in particular from the Protestant tradition, viz., from Luther and Calvin and later on from Jonathan Edwards. Insofar as Barth drew on orthodoxy, and he did do so deeply, Niebuhr found Barth congenial to his "personal conviction." Yet he did not accept the label "Barthian" and is very careful to distinguish himself from Barth in his criticism of him in several articles in the period 1930-35. In "Reformation: Continuing Imperative," he noted that some have called him "a Barthian (though I never accepted the label)" (p. 248). Niebuhr's criticism of Barth appears in "Religious Realism and the Twentieth Century," pp. 413-28; in "Theology in a Time of Disillusionment"; and in the unpublished paper read before the American Theological Society, 21 April 1933, "The Social Gospel and the Mind of Jesus."

There was a definite consistency which Niebuhr saw in the development of his thought. For though he saw the shape of his "theological formulation" of the doctrine of God taking on the character of orthodoxy, he also discerned the epistemological basis of his thought in the fiduciary character of all knowledge.[1] After the time of transformation in Niebuhr's life, he began to expand, with definite purpose, the notion of faith as trust and loyalty and its relation to epistemology as well as its relation to an experience of the sovereign God. This epistemological understanding of faith became the backbone of his thought.[2]

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[1] "My fundamental break with the so-called liberal or empirical theology was not due to the fact that it emphasized human sovereignty; to interpret it in that way is to falsify it in unjustifiable fashion. It was rather due to the fact that it defined God primarily in value-terms, as the good, believing that good could be defined apart from God. And now I came to understand that unless being itself, the constitution of things, the One beyond all the many, the ground of my being and of all being, the ground of its 'that-ness' and its 'so-ness,' was trustworthy--could be counted on by what had proceeded from it--I had no God at all. The change was not a change of definition of God but of personal realtions to my world and the ground of the world, to the givenness of life, history, myself. Since I came to that conviction or since it came to me, I have worked considerably at the problem of the nature and meaning of 'value' and at efforts to understand the basic relation of the self to that on which it is absolutely dependent. But the old theological phrase, 'the sovereignty of God,' indicates what is for me fundamental." HRN, "Reformation: Continuing Imperative," p. 248.

[2] I see a consistency from 1930 on in H. Richard Niebuhr which corroborates his own judgment on his thought: "The history of my convictions and concerns over the last 30 years--not to go back further--seems to me to be not only continuous but also consistent." HRN, "Reformation: Continuing Imperative," p. 248.

In this chapter and the following chapter we will trace the process of transformation in Niebuhr's thought. (1) First we will see the period of incubation in Niebuhr's thought (1921-29) which preceded the moment of change in his thought. (2) Secondly we will attempt to understand the import of this moment of transformation by examining in detail what he meant by "critical realism." (3) Then we will develop in greater detail some of the essential elements of the "theological formulation" he gave to the "personal conviction" he had of God's sovereignty. We will do this by analyzing an exchange of articles between H. Richard Niebuhr and his brother Reinhold. (4) Finally we will consider whether or not the consistency which we see shaping up between the early period of Niebuhr's thought and the time after his moment of change is as apparent as Niebuhr would have it. In other words, was Niebuhr justified in synthesizing what he had learned from the experiential tradition of American religious thought with the insights he had learned from neo-orthodoxy?

I. Period of Incubation: 1921-1929

A. "An Aspect of the Idea of God in Recent Thought"[1]

In Niebuhr's first published article, he wrote on the meaning of God. The article does not have the lucidity of presentation which many of his later writings have. This opaqueness is due in part to the eclecticism of Niebuhr in seeking support for his thesis in this article. For in his attempt to document his thesis Niebuhr drew on quotations from the pragmatist William James, quotations from the neo-realist John E. Boodin, and quotations from Henri Bergson, Josiah Royce, and H. G. Wells. The mixing together of the thought of these several men in a short article result in a potpourri of ideas. Such eclecticism is indicative of a young mind which had lots of ideas and which was ready to draw things together precipitately.

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[1] This caption heading for the section which follows is the title of the first article written by H. Richard Niebuhr. It can be found in Magazin für Evangelische Theologie und Kirche 48 (1920): 39-44.

Though the "youngness" of Niebuhr's thought is quite apparent in this article, what interests us about it is that, in his earliest years on the academic scene,[1] Niebuhr was reading and assimilating some ideas from the American empirical tradition and from other writings he considered similar to this tradition. That he chose this tradition to elaborate on what he considered "an aspect of the idea of God" in current thought in 1920 is indicative of his interest in experiential models of the experience of God other than revelation.

In the initial statement in this article Niebuhr sounded an experiential note: "Practically if not theoretically we accept the judgment today that our definitions of God's nature are conditioned by our need of Him."[2] Then he singled out two needs which modern men have, "one arising out of the scientific explanations of the cosmos and the evolutionary theory of life and the other rooting in the problem of evil. The need for God from these two points of view is the need on the one hand making the world rational and on the other of making it a livable home for man." He then elaborated how "science and naturalism" reject any God or spiritual value because they consider the world as "one of rigid necessity" and because they teach that all being is "bodily and all causality mechanical."[1]

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[1] This article was written during the time of Niebuhr's first teaching position when he taught theology and ethics at Eden Seminary from 1919 to 1922.

[2] HRN, "An Aspect . . . ," p. 39. The full empirical force of this statement in Niebuhr's thought is immediately qualified by him in the next sentence: "Tho it is not true

Of the three reactions to this mechanistic view of the world which Niebuhr enumerated he singled out the pragmatic view and expanded on it. It is the view which in accepting "the world of science" finds "in it teleology rather than mechanism."

> The pragmatic theory of knowledge is simply this: that the mind is a 'teleological mechanism' and that feeling and intellection exist only for the sake of the will. Behavior is the sole end of thought. Hence those thoughts which are most conducive to the activity of human energy in the right direction are the only truly rational thoughts. From this fact pragmatism deduces the right to believe, since belief leads to right action.[2]

The emphasis in pragmatism is on the will and on action. Niebuhr perceived in this attitude found in William James's thought a

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in any absolute sense that 'Mit der Menschheit wachsen seine Goetter', . . ." In fact Niebuhr manifests at the end of this article an orthodox notion of God's sovereignty: "Belief in his omnipotence has been faith in the potentiality of his power and in the victory rather than a belief in his active causation of all events" (p. 44). Yet there is present in this article a tension between Niebuhr's orthodox belief and the teachings of empirical philosophy.

[1] *Ibid*. p. 39

[2] *Ibid*., p. 40.

tendency leading to a kind of theism, "for theism is the only attitude toward the universe as a whole which is able to set the energies of men free to function within it."[1] The existence of God is not proved in this view; rather, God is a matter of a decision which must be made by humans. They are given a "forced option," and "they must decide for God or against him; by refusing to decide at all they decide against, since meanwhile life goes on and some plan of action has been followed."[2]

What is interesting for us in Niebuhr's analysis of James's idea of God is the way Niebuhr centered in on decision. An individual must commit himself; over this he has no choice. We will find this emphasis on decision developed by Niebuhr in his more mature thought, e.g., in his analysis of faith wherein he saw the commitment being given either to the one God (monotheism) or to the false gods (polytheism or henotheism). Since one cannot speak of God, in Niebuhr's later thought, without also speaking of man's faith-response, this early awareness of Niebuhr about the decisional quality of faith is important for understanding his doctrine of God and showing it in relation to his understanding of critical realism.

And though the later Niebuhr did not reflect a strong Jamesian influence, in this article he did pick out from

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 40-41.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 41

James's thought this element of faith as decision. He expanded on this notion of faith in his later writings.

Another point which Niebuhr considered to be of importance to a theory of religion in James's thought was James's doctrine of pluralism. Empiricism issues in pluralism: "Things have independent existence and all the relations of logical implication and organic unity are denied." In this connection, Niebuhr quoted James: "Things are 'with' one another in many ways but nothing includes everything or dominates over everything. The word 'and' trails along after every sentence."[1]

The worth of this doctrine of pluralism, as Niebuhr understood it in this article, is found in applying it to the problem of evil. When opposed to a view of intellectualism which sees an inherent connection between good and evil, pluralism makes no necessary connection between them. "This position issues in the religion of meliorism. The world may be perfected by the elimination of evils, and the conflict with evils is a real conflict in which the victory is not yet gained but lies in the future. The efforts of men are therefore of crucial importance."[2]

The doctrine of God which results from a Jamesian doctrine of pluralism is a doctrine of a finite God, for on the pluralistic view God is a part of creation and not the creator of the whole of creation. Niebuhr quoted James: "As God is not all things He can be an eternal (i.e., unceasing) tendency making for righteousness and need not be, as on all theories he must be, the responsible author of evil." Niebuhr concluded in his own words: "So God also becomes the creator not of the totality of nature, but of the spiritual life, of ethical progress and civilization. And again, since man's most efficient effort lies in his collective action pragmatism emphasizes the social meaning of God, as a leader of a common cause."[1]

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[1] *Ibid*., The reference to where the quotation is from in James's works is not given.

[2] *Ibid*.

Niebuhr saw this view of a finite God as one which fulfilled the needs of modern men "who are less conscious of personal sin and guilt than of the capriciousness of life in dealing out pain and suffering without regard to desert or merit." A concept of a finite God fulfills the needs of modern man because it faces squarely the problem of evil as seen in the capriciousness of life while at the same time it gives modern man confidence in the ability of life to improve. God, on this view, becomes the principle of good-living and the motivation towards achieving the good life. Such a conception of God then becomes the basis for a "restoration of the teleological argument in a new form"[2]

Though Niebuhr did not consider this doctrine of a finite God satisfactory from his view as a Christian, he did find some encouragement for religious, believing people in this theory.

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[1] *Ibid*. The reference to where the quotation is from in James's works is not given.

[2] *Ibid*., p. 42.

For it is a view built out of science which does not repudiate faith in God as a foolish and useless waste of time.[1]

Niebuhr's own solution to the problem of evil and a view of God capable of bearing weight in the face of modern scientific advances is hinted at towards the end of this article. The essential difference between him and the "meliorists," as he termed the men he had considered in this article, lies "in the element of resignation in the Christian religion." This view grows out of a faith in the redemptive mystery of Jesus' death, a view which says that one must understand Jesus in terms of his death as well as his resurrection. In Niebuhr's words, "it is from the symbol of the crucified, more than from that of the risen Christ, that Christianity has drawn its greatest ethical power."[2]

In summary, we see that in this article Niebuhr saw himself in sympathy with the pragmatic and neo-realistic doctrine of a finite God, though it seems he did not accept the doctrine of a finite God. However, he did accept from the pragmatic and neo-realistic philosophies three elements which became part and parcel of his mature thought: (1) The decisional quality of faith; (2) the fact of pluralism; and (3) a realistic acceptance of the fateful quality of both moral and natural evil. In accepting a realistic attitude towards evil, it seems, Niebuhr was attempting to go beyond the traditional answer of theodicy to the problem of evil, viz., that evil as a privation has no cause, therefore God is not the cause of evil but he does permit it. We will see below how Niebuhr developed theologically a conception of redemptive suffering through a theory of God the "void" and God the "enemy" and God the "companion."

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[1] "Despite so great a divergence as this it is heartening to find in the schools and in the ranks of popular writers such evidences of a return of faith in God,--a faith which may yet take another step of approach toward a Christian God who is no less the Captain of Humanity and the leader in the battle for righteousness." Ibid., p. 44.

[2] Ibid. Niebuhr indicates here in his earliest writing the theme of redemptive suffering and a doctrine of God built on God's sovereignty. Niebuhr will develop in his mature writings this Christological theme; there it takes the form of a theological understanding of Jesus Christ as the transformer of human value and the form of a doctrine of God which is critical, that is destructive of human frailty, and yet a doctrine which is positive in that it gives men confidence in their ability to do good.

B. Growing Awareness of Pluralism and Relativism

From 1921 to 1929 H. Richard Niebuhr pursued the theme of pluralism which in his first article he had equated with the pragmatic tradition. During this time, he sharpened up his understanding of pluralism in several ways. For example, he used the topic of his doctoral dissertation to learn more about the implications of pluralism from an analysis and understand- of Troeltsch's "relativism."[1] After completing his thesis, he put to practical use what he had learned about pluralism from pragmatism and from Troeltsch in The Social Sources of Denominationalism, a sociological study of pluralism in American Christianity. In 1929 he began to develop his relativistic theory of ethics, a view which clearly grew out of his understanding of pluralism.[1]

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[1] HRN, "Ernst Troeltsch's Philosophy of Religion." See especially pp. 196-218; 258-63.

Two things should be said about this period from 1921 to 1929. The first is that, although Niebuhr did learn much about relativism from his study of Troeltsch during this time, there is no indication that Troeltsch was the sole source for this understanding. In other words, the theme of relativism which becomes an integral part of Niebuhr's mature thought has its origin, in part, in the American empirical tradition. And the fact that the subject matter of the study in The Social Sources of Denominationalism is "American" Christianity indicates that Niebuhr is self-reflectively considering the American implications of the meaning of pluralism. The second thing that should be said is that this period was a time of development in Niebuhr's awareness of the meaning of plurality. This fact can be seen in The Social Sources of Denominationalism in which he discerned clearly the negative aspects of pluralism but had little positive to say about it. In this book he demonstrated perceptively the divisiveness of pluralism as exemplified by denominationalism, but he could not offer any positive way to unite the plural viewpoints other than a homiletic plea. He had not developed fully to his satisfaction a theory of relativity which is not only negative but also positive in its import.[2]

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[1] H. Richard Niebuhr, Moral Relativism and the Christian Ethic (New York: International Missionary Council, 1929).

[2] Niebuhr himself articulated his own dissatisfaction in the "Preface" to The Kingdom of God in America: "Though the sociological approach helped to explain why the religious stream

By 1930 Niebuhr was able to unite pluralism and relativism under a doctrine which had a positive meaning as well as a negative meaning. He did this through his doctrine of God's sovereignty. "Critical realism" was the title Niebuhr gave to his mature statement on relativism and God. Before analyzing critical realism, we need to explore in greater depth the development of Niebuhr's thought on pluralism during the time between 1921 and 1929.

The major formative influence on Niebuhr during this period was his doctoral dissertation on Ernst Troeltsch. Several studies have already traced the influence of Ernst Troeltsch on Niebuhr's thought.[1] In our study we will not duplicate this scholarship. Here we refer only to some of these studies and the conclusions therein that indicate Niebuhr's understanding and use of Troeltsch's idea of "relativism." Our major concern however will be to see how Niebuhr understood Troeltsch's relativism in relation to American pragmatism. Our further concern

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flowed in these particular channels it did not account for the force of the stream itself; while it seemed relevant enough to the institutionalized churches it did not explain the Christian movement which produced these churches; while it accounted for the diversity in American religion it did not explain the unity which our faith possesses despite its variety; while it could deal with the religion which was dependent on culture it left unexplained the faith which is independent, which is aggressive rather than passive, and which molds culture instead of being molded by it. Furthermore, the only answer I was able to give the problem of Christian disunity was in the form of a new appeal to good will to overcome stubborn social divisions and to incarnate the ideal of Jesus. This appeal seemed, upon critical reflection, to be wholly inadequate." The Kingdom of God in America (New York: Harper & Row, Harper Torchbook, 1959) pp. ix-x. (Hereafter abbreviated KGA.)

[1] See footnote one, p. 12 in Chapter One, above.

will be to see how Niebuhr developed his own view of pluralism and relativism, in part, from an understanding of the American empirical tradition.

Through his study of Troeltsch's philosophy of religion, Niebuhr was led to examine more closely the tension which arises between an empirical approach to religious experience and a rationalist approach to religious experience. The major thrust of Niebuhr's dissertation is, on the one hand, a description of the tension between two phases of thought in Troeltsch, viz., the tension between a neo-Kantian rationalist approach to religious experience and an empirical, realist approach to religious experience. On the other hand, the thrust of Niebuhr's dissertation is an analysis of how Troeltsch united these two in a compromise synthesis which itself is incomplete.[1] In analyzing how Troeltsch struggled with this tension, Niebuhr learned what to do with his own struggle over the tension between a traditional belief in God and the plurality of religious experience.[1]

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[1] "Troeltsch's philosophy of religion must be regarded then as something less than a unified structure. Two approaches and two main ideas are combined without being brought into complete accord. They do not conflict so much as they resist inclusion into a single scheme. Troeltsch's philosophy reveals itself as an attempt to combine social, traditional religion with personal, more or less mystical religion, to carry the assurance of mysticism and Kantian rationalism into the realm of mediate and nonrational, empirical religion, but to do justice to the social necessity of cult and the historical character of religious thought. Troeltsch deals with antinomies, or at least with polar contrasts, in religion. Conservatism and liberalism, rationalism and anti-rationalism, logos and myth, individual and community--these are the factors which he seeks to combine. The inclusiveness of the attempt merits an admiration which it may be necessary to withhold from the results." HRN, "Ernst Troeltsch . . . ," p. 116.

1. Niebuhr's Analysis of Troeltsch

In his philosophy of religion Troeltsch developed his rationalist critique of the religious experience along the line of neo-Kantianism which said, "the question of truth in religious experience must be settled . . . by reference to an a priori element in such experience."[2] But before he dealt with the question of validity and truth, he found it necessary to examine the religious experience itself. The data of the experience are to be left empirical; in the case of religious experience, they are to be considered as part of the conscious experience and not explained away by reducing them to sense-data as is done by positivism.

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[1] At this time Niebuhr has not made fully explicit what he accepted from Troeltsch and what he rejected. What is to the point of our thesis is how Niebuhr pursued the experiential quality of religion in his dissertation. Niebuhr did this partly, it seems, under the guidance of his doctoral father, D. C. Macintosh; but, it also seems, Niebuhr pursued the empirical quality of religion through the provocation of the question of whether God is finite or infinite, a question which he learned from American pragmatism and which he raised in "An Aspect of God in Recent Thought."

The influence in general of Macintosh on Niebuhr's interest in the experiential quality of religion can be assumed from all the work Macintosh himself did on religious experience, e.g., Theology as an Empirical Science (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1919). The more direct influence of Macintosh on Niebuhr's selection of a thesis topic is noted by James Fowler; in 1919 Macintosh printed an article which points out the tension in Troeltsch's thought between a Kantian-rational and a Jamesian-empirical approach to religious experience--the same tension which is at the heart of Niebuhr's dissertation. See Fowler, To See The Kingdom, pp. 17-18; see also D. C. Macintosh, "Troeltsch's Theory of Religious Knowledge," American Journal of Theology 22 (1919): 274-76.

[2] HRN, "Ernst Troeltsch . . . ," p. 169.

Troeltsch's way of framing what is "empirical" has Kantian overtones. "Since the criticism of miracles made supernaturalistic dogmatic philosophy of religion untenable and the criticism of the self-evident truths of reason by Hume and Kant gave the coup de grace to natural theology, science of religion has been forced to retreat to the analysis of the religious consciousness."[1] The empirical data of religious consciousness are provided for in a psychology of religion. Troeltsch however rejected as not empirical any kind of psychology of religion which prejudged the experience. These types of religious psychology are not empirical, for they already have made evaluative judgments on the experience and, by doing so, have crossed over into the epistemology of religious experience. They have not let the experience stand as it is. Troeltsch, on the other hand, emphasized "the distinction which must be made between psychology and epistemology. The psychology of religion . . . can not decide, so long as it remains truly empirical, whether or not the essence of religion which it has isolated and defined has any value as knowledge."[2] "Psychology can deal only with the manner in which religion arises, not with the inner cause which brings it forth. It may show the 'How', and not the 'Why'."[3]

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[1] _Ibid_. p. 117. [2] _Ibid_., p. 165. [3] _Ibid_., p. 143.

We see then a dualism shaping up in Troeltsch's approach to the problem of religious experience. On the one hand, for him it was self-evident "that all modern science must begin in the region to which Hume and Kant confined it, in the realm of conscious experience. 'The standpoint of conscious-immanence is the only possible point of departure for scientific thought' in the world of matter. Science can only arrange and classify the content of consciousness according to its own immanent laws and categories. And what is true of natural science is true to large extent of the science of religion."[1] On the other hand, in keeping a religious psychology distinct from an epistemology of religious experience he tried to uphold the empirical basis of the religious experience. There are therefore two sides to Troeltsch's analysis of religious experience. Troeltsch's epistemological evaluation of the religious experience results in his theory of a religious a priori. His attempt to define the religious a priori represents his critical, rationalist tendency in explaining religious experience, whereas his concern to keep the empirical data distinct from any evaluation of it represents his empirical, anti-rational tendency in explaining religious experience.

On the side of his rationalist tendency, Troeltsch spoke of a religious a priori, viz., the element in every genuine religious experience that is universally valid. To prove the truth of religious knowledge or experience is to demonstrate its validity. "To attempt to prove the truth of religion must mean, then, to attempt to demonstrate its validity, that is, its derivation from or relation to such a [a priori-like] conscious-immanent principle of reason."[1] Apriority on this view means that certain principles or values cannot be explained as something derived from presuppositions or antecedents. "They convince by means of their immanent meaning and are not dependent for that meaning upon anything outside of themselves."[2]

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[1] Ibid., p. 164.

The problem in religious experience is to isolate this principle from the psychological data. One does this by trusting his reason; this trust however is not purely rational but also an act of the will. "The recognition of the valid in the empirical is an intuition, the self-recognition of reason, but is also an act of the will, which is not arbitrary but which includes,--after mature deliberation and comparison,--an element of adventure, eventually 'a staking of one's life upon the card of one's decision.'"[3]

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[1] Ibid., p. 167.

[2] Ibid., p. 170.

[3] Ibid. Niebuhr at this point gives a page-long discursus on the difficulty of determining an a priori; it seems to be his own reflection, indicating a hesitancy on his part to buy into Troeltsch's metaphysical solution. "The whole concept of the apriori has become one of the most difficult of philosophical problems and the historical viewpoint of modern times has brought all aprioris into a state of flux or involved them in historical relativism. But no matter how much one draws the apriori into the flux of evolution, or how much one emphasizes its connection with the organs of sense and spatial and temporal forms of thought, it remains an activity of reason which forces its way through the empirical by means of an inner logical necessity and aspires toward a universal connectedness of all thing." Ibid., p. 171.

The function of the religious a priori is not to demonstrate the existence of the religious object; rather it shows the validity of religious knowledge and thus keeps it from being reduced to some other kind of knowledge. "The discovery of an apriori element in religion does no more than to guarantee the inner necessity of religion and its independence from other functions of the human mind. It guards it from being dissolved in the psychological analysis of experience as a mere illusory product of the causal or social thinking of men."[1]

Troeltsch's definition of the religious a priori focuses on its capacity to integrate the self and to give final meaning to the other a prioris of reason. On Niebuhr's description of it, the religious a priori is "the law of the self-apprehension of the unity of consciousness in a transcendent ground, such a law being indicated by the fact of the psychological fusion of separate conscious realities into an obscure unity within the mind." Niebuhr quotes Troeltsch who defines the religious a priori as "the absolute relation issuing from the essence of reason to an absolute substance, by virtue of which all realities and especially all values are related to an absolute substance as their source and standard."[2]

The religious a priori establishes religious experience as an independent sphere of the psyche. It also points out an absolutely obligating factor in the religious experience. The independence of religious experience from other kinds of experience and its obligatory character are not just part of a formal category but "owe their absolute imperative quality to the connection of the human spirit with a transcendental spiritual Life, which is apprehended in the mystic experience."[1] Niebuhr summarizes the meaning of Troeltsch's a priori in this way:

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[1] Ibid., p. 174

[2] Ibid., p. 181.

> The term apriority, as used by Troeltsch means, then, primarily only this, that reason is autonomous and finally not analyzable by psychological laws nor construable as a part of the natural causal process. The term religious apriori is a formula for the autonomy of the religious consciousness, especially as it develops in the mystic experience. It connotes the feeling of conviction, the imperative obligation and necessity which may attach to religious ideas.[2]

Troeltsch recognized that the rational approach to religion presents a problem at the time when it comes for the actualization of the religious a priori in real life. At this time, it becomes apparent that there is an element of the irrational in religious experience which cannot be rationalized under the category of the religious a priori. "It is impossible to substitute a rational religion for the positive religions; every attempt to do so has been vain, and must be vain in the nature of the case, for the rational alone without the empirical is incomplete."[3] The a priori must be given some content from the world of the given; and this world of the given is the realm of history and culture. It is a realm subject to change. "The discovery of the apriori in the empirical is therefor a task which must be renewed. The valid can not be determined once and for all as Kant sought to do, but since it is the rational in the empirical it must be sought anew with every change in the empirical."[1]

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 191. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 193. *Ibid.*, p. 197.

Troeltsch's recognition of the irrational in the actualization of the a priori evolved out of his empirical, realist approach to the religious experience. The emphasis from this viewpoint is on the historical-cultural, and not on the epistemological-formal as from the viewpoint of the religious a priori. With the empirical view there is the possibility of something new happening.

> Again, the irrational element comes to light in production of the new. According to the principles of rationalism there can never be anything really new. Everything is contained in the rational whole and what seems new can be at best only a new phenomenal appearance of always present general and universal energies, or the actualization of something potential. Consistent rationalism must deny, as the Eleatics did, all movement and all becoming. But if reality of movement and becoming is asserted the irrational or contingent element at once appears. In dealing with history and evolution this irrational element is of greatest importance. History is the province of the new and the creative, that which was not contained in the antecedents although connected in some way with its antecedents.[2]

Troeltsch learned respect for the empirical and realist approach from Max Weber, Henri Bergson, and William James. What interests us here is the influence of William James and the fact that Niebuhr highlighted James as one of the empirical influences on Troeltsch.

James's Varieties of Religious Experience is the main source from which Troeltsch drew to develop his own psychology of religion. He appreciated the effort of James to be unbiased about the religious experience, and he appreciated James's refusal "to determine at the outset what the essence of religion is or to settle questions of metaphysics and truth-value."[1] Troeltsch found himself in sympathy with James's "love of the individual and the concrete and found his own psychological theory of religion supported and extended by James' discussion, which also discovered the center of religious experience in mystic apprehension of 'something there'."[2]

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 172. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 205.

Though Troeltsch appreciated the realism with which James spoke of the religious experience, he never completely bought into the pluralistic view it contained. "Such a theory however, while it is able to do justice to the empirical vividness and multiplicity of religious phenomena, can establish nothing as to their truth or knowledge value. If it seeks to answer the question as to truth it must leave the empirical and pragmatic basis and make deductions as to the character of metaphysical reality which are no longer empirically verifiable but dependent upon rational grounds."[3]

For Troeltsch a compromise between rationalism and empiricism was the solution to the tension between them. Niebuhr described the way Troeltsch tried to resolve the tension between these two tendencies as "realism." Niebuhr enumerated six elements that are found in Troeltsch's realism.

> This sort of realism means, 1) that all concepts of the natural sciences are working hypotheses; 2) that all concepts of the historical sciences are transformations, systematizations and concentrations of a much

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 131. [2] *Ibid.*, pp. 74–75. [3] *Ibid.*, pp. 166–167.

> richer reality of facts; 3) that all isolations of the subject and especially of the conscious subject are only artificial abstractions from a continuous racial consciousness (Gattungsbewusstsein) and from a subconscious life which flows into some sort of unity with the physical; 4) that all our culture and our religious ideals are emanations out of a complicated movement of life which no kind of research can completely illuminate; 5) that the whole realm of rationally clear facts and norms in nature and history is embraced always by a much broader realm, a wide, dark mass of the purely actual and living; and, 6) that the relation between the rational and non-rational or "irrational" cannot be rationally determined.[1]

With this realism Troeltsch could countenance the relativity of his religious a priori without abandoning all rational evaluation of the experience. The result is a relative apriorism, which recognizes that the value of the truth is not universal or eternal yet is still valid for that time; "though the relativity of values need to be conceded their validity need not be surrendered."[2] Each era, each person, has some center of value which integrated life; each is bound to this center absolutely. And yet the absoluteness of this standard is relative to its place in history. "Obviously apriority so defined is quite a different thing from Kantian apriority. It does not mean universal validity, nor timelessness nor imperativeness for all men."[3]

The apriority then, which we can claim for our values, is not universal or eternal, but it does give us a "presentiment of the meaning of all because of our apprehension of the meanings of the moment."[4] Behind this "realism" of Troeltsch's analysis of the religious experience is a metaphysical stance. There is some kind of a "secret alliance" between our thought and reality.[1] This alliance builds on a metaphysics which sees a "connection between the rational principle in human consciousness and a rational world-ground which comes to expression in the principles of human reason."[2] It is a "metaphysics of the finite monad with the Infinite Absolute."[3]

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[1] _Ibid_., pp. 214-215.

[2] _Ibid_., p. 252.

[3] _Ibid_., p. 255.

[4] _Ibid_., p. 257.

Niebuhr in a summary statement pointed out the compromise character of Troeltsch's synthesis of rationalism and empiricism which Niebuhr has called "realism." "This realism with its acceptance of the non-rational totality of life and of pluralism but with its demand for the forcing in of the rational into the non-rational and its tendency toward monism, is an incomplete synthesis of the rationalist and anti-rationalistic elements in Troeltsch's thought. In it we have once more the compromise between antitheses which is so characteristic of actual life."[4]

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[1] Ibid., p. 256. [2] Ibid., p. 68.

[3] Ibid., p. 196. Hoedemaker makes the following comment on Troeltsch's monadology: "It is clear that the ultimate solution is a metaphysical one. Individuality and development of the whole can only be brought together in a system which views both as ultimately connected. In the book on the absoluteness of Christianity, Troeltsch places the emphasis on the end, the goal of history, which always transcends the particular historical situation yet is grasped in it; in his work on historism he leans toward a Leibnizian monadology, in which the perfection and the harmony of the whole find their expression in the widest possible manifoldness and individuality. This is true universality: the ever new, ever individual appearance of the direction of divine life." The Theology of H. Richard Niebuhr, p. 15.

[4] HRN, "Ernst Troeltsch . . .," p. 216.

This attempt to combine rationalism and anti-rationalism is ambiguous and incomplete:

> Every attempt to combine the antithesis leads to irremediable contradictions although the combination must be attempted anew and ever again. In religion the contradiction comes to light again as between the idea of the plural, living and free character of the world in God and and [sic] the creative activity of God on the one hand, and the unity of the world, the rule of the Supersensual and the thought of a divine law which unites all things, on the other hand. Practically the two sides are held together in theism, but theoretically they can never be harmonized. The mixed universe remains a mixture of pluralism and monism, of rationalism and the non-rational, of the obligating norms and the mere stuff of life.[1]

We see in Niebuhr's analysis of Troelsch two ways in which Niebuhr added to his own awareness of the empirical and the real. On the one hand, Niebuhr had deepened his awareness of the pluriformity of religious experience about which he first wrote in the article, "An Aspect of the Idea of God in Recent Thought." On the other hand, Niebuhr had come to understand the need for some center of value to unite this relativity.[2]

At this time Niebuhr had not fully developed his own theory of critical realism. There is, however, a correlation between the six-point description of Troeltsch's realism, which is quoted above,[3] and Niebuhr's own realistic approach which came to mature expression in the 1930's.[1] The basic element which Troeltsch added to Niebuhr's realism, it seems, was the concept of relativism. As we have seen, however, Niebuhr had brought his own concern over plurality to his study of Troeltsch; Troeltsch only helped Niebuhr to sharpen up his perception of the full implications of relativism.[2]

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[1] _Ibid_., pp. 216-17.

[2] As one commentator on Troeltsch's influence on Niebuhr puts it, the structure of the problem for Troeltsch remains the same for Niebuhr even though in his mature thought Niebuhr modified Troeltsch: ". . . the _structure_ of the problem of Troeltsch remains. With this we mean the persistent tendency to approach religion _culturally_ with an emphasis on _relativity_, and to approach culture religiously with a quest for the _absolute_." Hoedamaker, p. 17.

[3] See footnote three, pp. 72-73, above.

What was happening in the evolution of Niebuhr's thought at this time? Niebuhr had deepened his appreciation for the experiential realistic approach to religious experience which he learned in part from American pragmatism. Part of Troeltsch's thought, the man who helped Niebuhr to appreciate more fully relativity, is also in part influenced by American pragmatism; we have seen above the influence of William James on Troeltsch's empirical, realist approach to religious experience. Niebuhr was consciously pursuing at this time a concept of the empirical in his own understanding of religious experience; and part of this conscious endeavor on Niebuhr's part was an awareness of the American empirical philosophical tradition.

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[1] Fowler comments on the correlation between Niebuhr's and Troeltsch's realism and points out Niebuhr's reluctance to buy the rationalism of neo-Kantianism. "Because Niebuhr was always more impressed by the historicist side of neo-Kantianism than by its rationalist side, his congruence with Troeltsch's realism did not have to involve the syndrome of reason attacking reason in the interest of the 'irrational' as Troeltsch's statement does." Fowler, To See the Kingdom, p. 23.

[2] In a later time, Niebuhr tells us clearly how Troeltsch influenced his idea of relativism: "Troeltsch has taught me to respect the multiformity and individuality of men and movements in Christian history, to be loath to force this rich variety into prefashioned, conceptual molds, and yet to seek logos in mythos, reason in history, essence in existence. He has helped me to accept and to profit by the acceptance of the relativity not only of historical objects but, more, of the historical subject, the observer and interpreter." CC, p. xii.

Yet in 1924 Niebuhr had not come up with a concept of the empirical fully suited to his own belief in God's sovereignty which he had inherited from the general Christian tradition. But we do see the paths along which he will seek out the meaning of the empirical. His incipient thoughts about realism led him to reject the assertions of certain positivists in science and philosophy who reduced the religious experience to sense-data; these thoughts also led him to reject the assertions of positivists of revelation in Christian theology who claimed a place for revelation outside experience.

2. Niebuhr's Quest for the Empirical

An important partner for Niebuhr at this period in his search for a concept of the empirical adequate to his belief in God was D. C. Macintosh. Those parts of Niebuhr's dissertation which deal with the psychology of religion and with Troeltsch's "realism" indicate the direction of Macintosh.[1] The fact that Macintosh was Niebuhr's doctoral father is reason enough to explain the influence of Macintosh on Niebuhr's dissertation.

There is however indication that Niebuhr was influenced further by Macintosh. It seems that Niebuhr was in a dialectical relationship with Macintosh over the meaning of the empirical content of the religious experience. Niebuhr learned from Macintosh, as he did from his study of Troeltsch, the need for the empirical in religion. Niebuhr's own mature thought on the empirical, which he called "critical realism," is strongly influenced by Macintosh's own realism, which Macintosh called "critical monistic realism."[1] Yet, as we shall see, Niebuhr eventually modified Macintosh's realism with a theological concept of crisis which he in part learned from Barth and Tillich. Macintosh's realism was expressed much more philosophically than Niebuhr's mature concept of realism which heeded the norms of the Church tradition.

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[1] HRN, "Ernst Troeltsch's . . . ," Chapter VI "The Psychology of Religion," pp. 117-62. Macintosh's own concern for establishing the empirical character of religious experience is seen in this chapter where Niebuhr was intent on showing the empirical quality of religious experience as defined by Troeltsch.

At this time Niebuhr was confronted with Macintosh as a fellow traveler who acted as a mentor as well as a provocateur for Niebuhr. Macintosh was a person who was part of the odyssey of Niebuhr's intellectual development but who was not the city of final dwelling at the end of Niebuhr's intellectual journey. It appears that Macintosh represented a hurdle on the path of Niebuhr's intellectual journey; and, as the hurdle is an important part of some races, so Macintosh was an important part of Niebuhr's intellectual development. And though Niebuhr's mature concept of realism is different from Macintosh's, Niebuhr did learn from Macintosh about the empirical meaning of religious experience.

Shortly after completing his dissertation, Niebuhr wrote an article on the psychology of religion indicating his approval of Macintosh's empirical treatment of religion. In this article, Niebuhr took to task many psychologies of religion precisely over the fact that they are not empirical enough. Because they are not empirical enough these psychologies have contributed to the "subjectivization of religion," where the emphasis is on the subjective and the ideal rather than on the objective and the empirical. "Theology has, therefore, become less rather than more, scientific under the tutelage of psychology. It has sacrificed even the modicum of precision it possessed to gain a method characterized by formlessness and uncertainty of its object."[1]

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[1] See for example, Theology as an Empirical Science, p. 258.

Niebuhr suggested two things as remedies to this subjectivization of theology. One was to follow the empirical approach which in the case of religious experience means to focus on the object of religion by "the observation and intense study of its object as it is revealed in history and in the ethical and spiritual life." The second suggestion which Niebuhr mentioned was to keep separate the critical theory of knowledge, that is, the judgment on the validity of the religious experience, from the religious object and experience of that object as it presents itself. If one followed these procedures he will then be doing theology in an empirical and scientific way. Niebuhr then identified Macintosh as one theologian who did precisely this kind of theology. "Such a theology, as it has been set forth by Professor D. C. Macintosh, is truly an empirical science and not an empiricist philosophy in which object and subject are dissolved in psychological experience."[1]

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[1] H. Richard Niebuhr, "Theology and Psychology: A Sterile Union," The Christian Century 44 (1927): 48.

a. Macintosh's Empirical Theology

To understand what Macintosh meant by empirical theology we need to consider those kinds of religious philosophy and theology over against which he counterposed his empirical theoloby. In Theology as an Empirical Science he listed several types of theological methods and discussed his empirical theology in relation to them.[2] Macintosh definitely saw his method as an improvement on the traditionalist, ecclesial theology and as an improvement on the rationalist approach to religious experience. And though he himself pursued a value-approach to religious experience, he was also critical of Schleiermacher, Ritschl and their followers in that Macintosh considered that their approaches treat the religious experience in too subjectivistic a fashion; they did not consider the data from an objective view. Macintosh also distinguished his empirical method from that of pragmatism and what he considered its method of reducing the objective data of religious experience to a purely human dimension.[3]

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Macintosh, Theology as an Empirical Science, pp. 7-46.

[3] In "Romanticism or Realism, Which?", Macintosh's contribution to a symposium on the philosophy of religion, Macintosh singles out Dewey to criticize, and he distinguishes himself from Dewey's humanistic empiricism in which "the God-idea is a mere optional symbol for social values,or (as an after-thought)

Macintosh affirmed the fact that there is an evolution in mankind's thought processes. In elaborating on the evolution of human thought he alluded to Comte's three stages in human thought, viz., mythical theology, abstract metaphysics and scientific theory, but he modified Comte's view concluding that the stages should not be considered linearly but rather cyclically. Mankind needs to return to the theological but now with the tools of science at its disposal. "Satiated with mere scientific knowledge of fact the mind seeks a comprehensive philosophical interpretation of the meaning of things, and even tends to return to a religious world-view. But what

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for undisputed natural and human factors supporting such values, apart from any adjustment to a specifically religious object." Found in an Appendix to American Philosophies of Religion, by H. N. Wieman and B. E. Meland (Chicago: Willett, Clark and Co., 1936), p. 328. See also Theology as an Empirical Science, pp. 22-24.

As is often the case with terminology, the same words can be used by different thinkers with different meanings. In this instance, Macintosh uses the word "empirical" in a way that is different from Dewey and other thinkers in the naturalist school of thought, e.g., H. N. Wieman's empirical theism. Wieman and Meland in discussing their reasons for including D. C. Macintosh under the title of "ethical intuitionist" rather than under the title of "religious realist" give an analysis which is helpful in distinguishing Macintosh's use of the word "empirical" and the naturalist's use of the word "empirical." On Wieman's and Meland's view, men such as Macintosh, for all their use of realistic and empirical methods, are still in the spirit of idealism: "The thinkers we have in mind who have rejected the idealistic theory of knowledge still continue to give cosmic status to mind. While they do not say, as the idealists do, that mind is the only ultimate reality, they do generally say that a Cosmic Mind is the ground and goal of the Universe. Most of them say that things, events, forms, have an ultimate reality of their own; but this Cosmic Mind is in control over all. It is the sovereign power." American Philosophies of Religion, p. 154.

is equally important, though not so often recognized, is that the last of the three stages, the positive or scientific, has application in the religious realm itself."[1]

For Macintosh, the problem of knowledge was crucial for the justification of theological thought through critical analysis. General problems in a theory of knowledge therefore needed to be considered in providing for an empirical theology. For Macintosh, the shape of the problem of knowledge had been determined by Kant. In knowing the objects given in an experience the question arises, do we know reality or do we only know the appearance while reality itself remains unknown? Macintosh rejected a dualist answer to this question which says the object given in the experience is totally different from the actual reality.[2] As we have seen, Macintosh followed a type of monism in answering the question presented by Kant, to wit, on the monistic view there is at least a partial identity between the object which is known and the reality which is independent of the knowledge of it. Monism however can be taken in two ways. Macintosh rejected the way of an idealist monism which said there is complete identity between the object known and the independent reality. Macintosh's approach was the way of critical monistic realism which affirmed a partial identity between the object known and reality, and yet this way of critical realism was aware that conditions of the knowing process did affect the character of the object that is known.[1]

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[1] Macintosh, "Romanticiam . . . ," p. 326. In Theology as an Empirical Science Macintosh elaborates on how the empirical method can provide modern man with a new theology: "To the undogmatic experience-religion of the present, it will be, with the help of modern science and the principles of induction, what the theology of Thomas Aquinas was to the external-authority religion of the middle ages with the aid of the Aristotelian logic and philosophy" (p. 45). "Perhaps empirical science will yet prove to be the best friend in disguise that religion has ever had. In the process of removing those things that are shaken, may it not become evident that things which are not shaken still remain? And may not thus a firm foundation be found for theology as a descriptive or empirical science" (p.5).

[2] Macintosh considers Barth a dualist and therefore sees Barth's view leading to an agnosticism and an uncritical dogmatism. An example of Macintosh's criticism of Barth is found

> The realistic theory of religious knowledge, as I hold it, posits a Divine Reality which exists whether it is recognized or not, which may be directly experienced and known, and which may not only have qualities which do not appear to us but may also have, as presented in our experience, apparent qualities which cannot be taken as valid revelation of what the independently existing Divine Reality is.[2]

There are three levels to an empirical theology on Macintosh's view. (1) The first level is the level of empirical evidence which deals with the question of "perceptual intuition" of the religious object. (2) The second level is the level of normative theology which deals with "imaginal intuitions," that is, intuitions distinct from the "perceptual intuitions" of the first level. The imaginal intuitions are more subjective. This level is not empirical but rather judges our sub-

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in "Romanticism . . . ," p. 323. It should be noted here that H. Richard Niebuhr's criticism of Barth is very similar to Macintosh's; we shall have opportunity below to see in full Niebuhr's criticism of Barth.

[1] The substance of this paragraph is a summary of Herbert R. Reinelt, "D. C. Macintosh," A Handbook of Christian Theologians, edited by M. E. Marty and D. G. Peerman (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1965), pp. 213-16.

[2] Macintosh, "Romanticism . . . ," p. 326.

jective religious needs in view of what has been learned from the empirical level and helps to determine what we humans need to believe in order to live as we ought. It is from an understanding of this level that Macintosh develops his idea of moral optimism. (3) The last level is the level of metaphysics. On the basis of what we have learned from the first two levels we can construct a theological theory. The first level deals with what _is_, the second with what _must be_, and the third with what _may be_.[1]

If theology is to be scientific it must take seriously the first level. As an empirical science theology makes the same assumptions that ordinary sciences make, the basic assumption being that provided for by critical monistic realism, viz., that knowledge of reality is possible. The presupposition which is unique to theology as an empirical science is theology's assumption of the reality of its subject matter.

> The empirical sciences assume the existence, and the possibility of empirical knowledge, of the objects they undertake to investigate. . . . On the basis of knowledge of God through religious experience, one can scientifically assume _that_ God is, although he may have as yet very little knowledge as to _what_ God is. It is just this latter, viz., what God is, that is to be investigated through scientific theological observation and experiment under the guidance of definite working hypotheses.[2]

Macintosh modified another assumption for his theological science which is common to all science, viz., the principle of uniformity or the dependableness of nature. "Corresponding to this principle of the dependableness of nature in the natural sciences, there must be at the basis of any empirically scientific theology the principle of the dependableness of God." Macintosh went on to point out that the dependability of God does not mean God can be counted on to do whatever man desires. Such arbitrariness is not the meaning of God's dependability in Macintosh's theology: "It means that God may be depended upon to act consistently, so that man may learn through observation and experiment what God does under different conditions."[1]

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[1] See _Theology as an Empirical Science_, p. 26, for a brief explanation of the three levels. The structure of the remainder of the book is divided into three parts, each part devoted to one of the levels.

[2] _Ibid._, pp. 28-29.

What distinguishes religious experience from other experience? There are two fundamental elements in religion which distinguish religious experience from other experience. The first is the human awareness of the ultimate reality expressed in feelings of absolute dependence, wonder and awe. The second is the human awareness of absolute values which are universally and finally valid.

> The criterion of the divine, therefore, is the unity of power and of value. Reality is felt as divine when it is felt to act in support of the highest values. Nothing less than a being which is ultimate in power and in concern for value could possibly be the object of religious worship, adoration, praise, confidence, and trust. Underlying Macintosh's theology is the conviction that men can know, at least in a general way, absolute values.[2]

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[1] Ibid., p. 35. Macintosh's principle of the dependability of God resonatesloudly with H. Richard Niebuhr's mature thought on God which speaks of God as the structure of things and as supremely trustworthy. We will have an opportunity below to expand on Niebuhr's own idea of God's dependability.

[2] Reinelt, "D. C. Macintosh," p. 219.

The next step in Macintosh's theology is to generalize theological laws on the basis of the religious experience. We discover that the reaction of God to man is conditioned by the adjustment of man to God. This divine response can be positive or negative depending on whether or not the human counterpart in the religious experience has the right motivation and is receptive to the presence of the divine in the experience. On the basis of the divine response to the human adjustment we can formulate theological laws. "As laws of the divine response to the right religious adjustment, they will include, although no longer in their traditionalistic form, the bulk of what the religious speak of as the 'promises' of God."[1]

An important part of the religious experience and of what Macintosh considered revelation is the "human adjustment." Macintosh was critical of those theologians who said man has no part in the revelation process. Macintosh's rejoinder to the Barthian warning, "There is no way from man to God!", is: "There is a way from man to God. It is not the way of mere self-confident volition, but the way of absolute surrender of one's will and life to the will and working of the religiously all-sufficient God."[2]

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[1] Macintosh, Theology as an Empirical Science, p. 41.

[2] Macintosh, "Romanticism . . .," p. 328. "But in opposition to the Barthian view, genuine revelation in the religious realm, as in that of sense-perception, is not a different process from discovery; it is simply another aspect of the same thing. Religious revelation is discovery of Divine Reality and Power. It is conditioned on the one hand by the constant stimulus of divine educational processes (including the testimony of those who have already found the way to God). On the other hand it is conditioned by the human response, by that self-abandon to the divine will

If we are to perceive God we must make the right religious adjustment. Macintosh laid down several ways in which one can attune himself to God:

> First, then, there must be *concentration of attention*, with the aid of appropriate guiding ideas, upon the Object of religious dependence, identified with the Source of religious deliverance, with special reference to a thoroughly moral end which represents "the soul's sincere desire." There must also be a whole-hearted or *absolute self-surrender* to the divine Being, a consecration and abandon of one's self to be worked upon and through by the divine Power; and at the same time an *absolute dependence* upon God with reference to the thoroughly moral and sincerely desired end which is to be realized with the assistance of the divine Power. It is also important that there be a willed *responsiveness*, or readiness for active expression, as the divine Being may seem to guide and impel. This is the really essential thing in faith. It involves trusting God; it is venturing to go ahead with one's own part in the process, counting upon God for adequate grace and power for the fulfillment of the duty before us. It is well, to be sure, to cultivate the habit of waiting before God for the necessary "enduement with power"; but one should not be too dilatory any more than he should be too precipitate. And finally, there should be a steady *persistence* in the religious attitude just described.[1]

It seems what Macintosh has done in this passage is to describe the process of "conversion." In several passages in *Theology as an Empirical Science* he connected this adjustment with the conversion process.[2] In his analysis of conversion, Macintosh was very receptive to Jonathan Edwards' *Treatise*

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and working which is comparable to the opening of the eyes to the ever-potential stimulus of the sunlight. There always is a divine initiative, and there always is also a human responsibility for response. Without the divine initiative and the beginnings of revelation doubtless man would never have faith enough to surrender his will and life to God; and without that faith and voluntary self-surrender revelation will never be adequately realized by man." *Ibid*., p. 329.

[1] Macintosh, *Theology as an Empirical Science*, p. 144.

[2] *Ibid*., pp. 33-34; pp. 134-135.

concerning Religious Affections.[1] This sympathetic response of Macintosh to Edwards is understandable, for as Edwards so also Macintosh was concerned to discern the experiential character of the religious response. And as Edwards had done, so also Macintosh did when he saw that the distinguishing element in religious experience is a decision which manifests itself in right moral action.

> When it [the conversion] takes place under social influence (as in a "revival"), emotional elements may be pronounced. But the conversion itself is essentially and primarily a decision, put into practice. . . . however emotional the experience, it is not Christian conversion until there has been the taking up of the Christian religious and moral attitude.[2]

b. Niebuhr's Understanding of Empirical

What was H. Richard Niebuhr doing with the experiential quality of religion at this time? In 1929, he wrote an article about moral relativism in which he combined some of the ideas about religious experience which he had learned from his study of Troeltsch and from the influence of study under Macintosh. In this article Niebuhr made a point of using the word empirical; his insistent reference to the empirical indicates that Macintosh's conception of theology as an empirical science was very much with Niebuhr at this time.

The article is a combination of what Niebuhr had learned from the Christian tradition and of what he had learned from empirical analysis of religious experience. It is the beginning of his mature formulation of a doctrine of God, but it is at the same time the end of his struggle over how to reconcile a doctrine of God's ultimacy and sovereignty with the empirical data of relativism and pluralism found in religious experience. The alpha-and-omega quality of this article makes it an intriguing piece of writing in the development of Niebuhr's thought.

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[1] Ibid., p. 34. We surmise that Macintosh is the person who introduced Niebuhr to Jonathan Edwards.

[2] Ibid., p. 134.

Niebuhr's concern in this article was to show why moral relativism need not be relative in a subjectivistic use of the word. An essential ingredient to the way Niebuhr showed why moral relativism need not mean moral indifferentism was a concept of God as that necessary factor in the intellectual and volitional life of human beings which allowed them to live as they ought. This way of speaking of God was part and parcel of Macintosh's empirical theology. God in this view is needed to explain the moral impulse in mankind; he is part of a theory used to explain human life. And yet, though Macintosh was intent on finding God immanent in human experience, his theory still did allow some transcendence.

We shall see that Niebuhr eventually will reject Macintosh's philosophical theory of God's transcendence. There is indication even in this article of some hesitancy on his part to invest full confidence in this theory. His demurral, however, comes only at the end of the article as a reference to revelation. Up to this point in the article, Niebuhr had been developing an argument heavily philosophical; at this point he says:

> Finally, of course, it is true that such conviction of the actuality of the holy, moral, loving will of God involves a large measure of faith. Verification remains incomplete. For Jesus upon the cross the only verification was a final daring act of trust; Paul staked everything on the verification offered by the resurrection of Christ.[1]

To speak of the resurrection, in this way, as a "verification" is to use the word "verification" in a way in which it is not used in the empirical sciences. In the 1930's Niebuhr will recognize this. At this time Niebuhr, however, was still toying with a philosophical theory about God whose empirical orientation intrigued Niebuhr.

The empirical orientation of Niebuhr in this article is seen in the way he equated the recognition of relativity with the fact of the way reality is. He pointed out some instances in the history of thought of the recognition of the relativity of morality, and he also pointed out that the rise of a theory of moral relativism was just another instance of this recognition. "Historically relativism appears as one movement in that inevitable rhythm between innovation and conservation, between emancipation and discipline which is the characteristic of all organic and spiritual life, and, perhaps, the necessary dialectic of progress."[2] Niebuhr however wanted to go beyond a mere recognition of a thesis-antithesis explanation of history and life. On his view moral relativism was to be considered less a theory and more as a statement of fact. "Relativism is really not so much a theory as a report of experience."[1]

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[1] HRN, Moral Relativism and the Christian Ethic, p. 11.

[2] Ibid., p. 3.

Contemporary man's ability to treat relativism as a statement of fact has been given him in part through methodologies of the social sciences. Sociology and the study of economics have shown that social and economic conditions have a lot to do with the variations in what men consider good and bad. Social psychology has gone even further than sociology and economics "in showing that not only the content but also the form of conscience may be something less than an absolute datum--a derivative from the social life rather than a category of practical reason."[2] Historical research also shows not only the relativity of morals in the development of Christianity but also that Jesus' own ethical code is relative to his place in history. And historical study shows even further that "the representatives of Christianity . . . seem unable to take an unbiased position in comparing their ethical system with that of other religions"; they use standards that are relative in comparing Christianity with other world religions.[3]

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[1] Ibid., p. 4.

[2] Ibid. Though Mead is not explicitly cited in Niebuhr's writings at this time, this reference to social psychology indicates Niebuhr had been reading Mead. In the summer of 1921 Niebuhr studied at the University of Chicago, and there is some speculation on whether or not Niebuhr encountered Mead then, if not in person at least through Mead's writings. See Fowler, To See The Kingdom, p. 3.

[3] HRN, Moral Relativism and the Christian Ethic, p. 5.

What's a good Christian to do in the face of all this evidence? Niebuhr spelled out two possible answers to this question, neither of which he opted for. The first is pure and simple dogmatism; it is the assertion of "the absolute superiority of his religious and ethical heritage, contending that Christianity is revelation while all other religions are merely human aspirations and that the Christian ethic is absolute while all other moral systems are relative."[1] Of course, if one opts for the way of dogmatic assertion, he must also allow other men of other religious belief to say the same of the Christian belief. The second way of meeting the problem is "that chosen by Christian rationalism which seeks for the absolute within the relative by distinguishing the rational from the empirical or from the traditional and thereupon proceeding to define the relation of Christian ethics to this rational absolute."[2] Of course, if one opts for this way, he must recognize that the determination of this "critical principle" is relative to the social group within which it arises.

Niebuhr's way to solve the problem presented by moral relativism was to combine elements which he found in these two kinds of "absolutisms" with the facts of relativity with which an empirical observation presents us. "The theory and the practical attitude of Christian ethics face to face with the facts and the temptations of relativism will need to embody within themselves not only the relative truth of moral relativism but also the truth-elements in these absolutisms."[1]

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[1] Ibid., p. 6.

[2] Ibid., p. 7.

The first step in combining the truth of relativity and the truth-elements of absolutism is to affirm the basic truth that relativity teaches us: "Don't absolutize the relative." Christians should resist "the temptation of making an absolute principle, valid for all time and places, out of such insights into principle as come to it under the pressure of new conditions."[2]

The second step Niebuhr would have the Christian use in combining relativity and absolutism is for Christians to become critical of their own tradition "in order that the purely cultural and Western influences may be distinguished from the original Christian content."[1] Historical inquiry offers the best method for distinguishing the original from the accretions.

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., pp. 7-8. This is the first clear statement of this principle in Niebuhr's writing. This principle becomes a motto for Niebuhr. It becomes one of those earmarks of Niebuhr's style, which is irenic in character rather than apologetic. Probably the finest statement of the Niebuhrian dictum comes in the Preface to The Meaning of Revelation: "Among the convictions which in part appear explicitly in this study and in part underlie the argument even where they do not become explicit, three seem to be of fundamental importance, though I may presuppose others of which I am less aware. The first is the conviction that self-defense is the most prevalent source of error in all thinking and perhaps especially in theology and ethics. I cannot hope to have avoided this error in my effort to state Christian ideas in confessional terms only, but I have at least tried to guard against it. The second idea is that the great source of evil in life is the absolutizing of the relative, which in Christianity takes the form of substituting religion, revelation, church or Christian morality for God. The third conviction, which becomes most explicit in the latter part of this essay but underlies the former part, is that Christianity is 'permanent revolution' or metanoia which does not come to an end in this world, this life, or this time. Positively stated these three convictions are that man is justified by grace, that God is sovereign, and that there is an eternal life." (p. x).

Niebuhr recognized that both of these principles are negative; such critical procedures do not answer the ultimate problem raised by relativism, viz., "the question whether there is present within the acknowledgedly relative code of any particular period an absolute element."[2] Niebuhr went on to state: "To say that there are relative elements in the Christian ethic, even in the New Testament formulation, is not to say that the Christian ethic is relative." Niebuhr gave two instances of how there can be an absolute appearing in the relative: "The absolute within the relative comes to appearance at two points--in the absolute obligation of an individual or a society to follow its highest insights, and in the element of revelation of ultimate reality."[1] Both of these elements were found in Macintosh's empirical theology; Niebuhr relied heavily on Macintosh both in singling out these two elements and in the way in which he elaborated on them.

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[1] HRN, Moral Relativism . . . , p. 8. The question that arises with this procedure is: "Does getting to the pristine origins of Christianity answer the question of where does the absolute appear?" Some Protestants think, e.g., Harnack, if we find the pristine origin, then we have the basic criterion for all development. However, analyses of Harnack's thought show his definition of "pristine" is in part determined by his own period; it is relative to his own time. Roman Catholicism approaches the problem via a theory of development of dogma which says there is a constant element in all faith which is "once for all" but which also develops. The problem of pristine, essential Christianity versus a theory of development of dogma is beyond the scope of this dissertation. It is however an instance of what Niebuhr is describing in this article; and what he says here has application in a theory of dogmatic development.

[2] HRN, Moral Relativism . . . , p. 8.

The first element, viz., the absolute obligating factor in human life, is a combination of the first two levels which Macintosh presented when he laid out the way for theology to be an empirical science. In this article Niebuhr said that there is the experience of the absolute in every man's life which is not just a subjective impulse (the first level of Macintosh, viz., an objective experience of the divine distinct from psychology); Niebuhr also stated that, in the case of Christians, this experience of the absolute takes on historically conditioned elements such as are determined by Christian belief and practice (the second level of Macintosh, viz., believing as we must so we can live as we ought). So even if we concede that the Christian ethic is not universally valid (i.e., not binding on Mohammedans or Buddhists), it nonetheless is experienced by the Christian as absolute.

> Even such a concession would not impair the obligation of the Christian to obey that will of God which, from his point of view, lays absolute obligation upon him. The obligation of the Christian to follow the Christian ethics does not arise, first of all, from the fact that Christianity is the universally valid religion but from the fact that he is a Christian. . . . There is a fateful and an obligatory element present in the very point of view which an individual or a society occupies not by choice but by fate. One who

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[1] *Ibid*., p. 9

> is born into a Christian society must needs share something of the Christian point of view. In a very real sense of the term "Christ is his fate." The viewpoint which is imposed upon him by his birth at this point of history and under these particular conditions is not only a limitation but also an opportunity for discovery, not only a confinement to a relative insight but also an obligation to make the best of his insight.[1]

The second way in which Niebuhr saw the absolute expressed in the relative was also influenced by Macintosh. Niebuhr called this second element the "revelation of ultimate reality." As we shall see, the use of the word "revelation" here is not what traditional Christianity means by it. One of the final adjustments Niebuhr will make on what he learned from Macintosh will be to reject Macintosh's way of speaking of revelation.

In this article, however, revelation is equated with the "adjustment" which men make to the "pattern of existence," which is the "will of God." In other words, the experience of the absolute in the relative is not just limited to the formal category of an "obligating factor" but also has some content.

> It [Christianity] has the right to claim that its experience of the will of God is not only obligatory in form but also in content; that its claim to absoluteness does not rest only upon the character of human experience but also on the character of reality; that goodness does not depend upon human judgment but on the pattern of existence, or the will of God. The discovery of the absolute within the relative is the discovery of the real within the apparent, of the permanent character in changing relations.[2]

The content of what or who God is, is determined by a gradual process of verification. "The discovery of this pattern of ultimate goodness has been the practical interest of that long process of trial and error which is set forth in the ethical experiments of all ages and races." The verification of the "content" of the experience of God, viz., the "revelation," is to be sought in the moral activity of those people who are governed by this insight. And as we get better at determining the "adjustment" men make to this "pattern of ultimate goodness," we humans come closer to a common understanding of who God is.

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 10.

> The large agreements which exist between the empirical ethics of modern times and the ethics of the great world-religions on the one hand and the Christian teaching on the other, point to a common underlying factor, the "will of God," to which men must needs adjust themselves for the attainment of their highest blessing.[1]

As we shall see, Niebuhr in the end will shy away from this moral optimism which is at the basis of Macintosh's thought. There are, however, strong influences of Macintosh on Niebuhr's thought in this article which remain in Niebuhr's mature thought. We need to single them out right now.

The best description of the most basic way in which Macintosh influenced Niebuhr is to say that Macintosh taught Niebuhr a nuanced understanding of what empiricism means and how empirical methodology can be used in theology. There are four ways in which an "empirical" understanding of theology, on Macintosh's understanding of the empirical, manifest themselves in Niebuhr's thought. (1) The first has to do with an epistemological stance common to all the sciences. This epistemological stance, sometimes called empiricism and sometimes realism, means that there is an objective reality which can be known.

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 11.

A further meaning of this epistemological stance is that all human knowledge of reality, and statement of it in language, is hypothetical. All formulae are relative. The Niebuhrian expression of this epistemological understanding common to all science is, "Don't absolutize the relative"; another manifestation of this in Niebuhr's thought is his escheval of any articulated metaphysical stance of his own. (2) A further influence on Niebuhr of Macintosh's understanding of empirical theology is seen in Niebuhr's recognition that revelation is a God-man relationship, that is, it is a communal activity involving three parties, as we will see in Niebuhr's triadic view of faith. Though Niebuhr in his mature thought adamantly refused to say anything about God in himself, he did insist that man is part of the revelation process. With this view of the revelation process, Niebuhr voiced a criticism of Barth that is similar to Macintosh's criticism of Barth. (3) The way in which Niebuhr will speak of God is to describe what happens in the human counterpart of the revelation process. To be able to speak of the human response, Niebuhr must presuppose a conception of God as supremely dependable, as the structure in things, as the pattern of existence; we have seen how the dependability of God is an integral part of Macintosh's construction of an empirical theology. (4) The counterpart of the dependability of God is the human adjustment. If nothing can be said about God in himself, a lot can be said about the human activity in the revelation process. The rest of Niebuhr's theological career is spent either in an analysis of faith (viz., the human counterpart of revelation) or in theological analysis of human ethics.[1] Niebuhr's understanding of faith as decision which manifests itself in right moral activity comes in part from Macintosh.

C. Summary

What we have laid out in this section is how a growing understanding of the empirical is integral to the period of development in Niebuhr's thought, and how this understanding in great part comes from a dialogue with the thought of certain American thinkers. We saw further how a doctrine of God is part of the resolution of the problem which an empirical approach presents to the believer. In fact, the problem which an empirical orientation gave Niebuhr is the problem of reconciling a plurality of experience of the divine with a unitary concept of God. Niebuhr's first written expression of this presented him with a choice between a finite God or an infinite God; in this article Niebuhr openly acknowledged James as the source for this thought. Through his study of Troeltsch, Niebuhr sharpened his own understanding of relativism. In his dissertation Niebuhr singled out James as part of Troeltsch's development. That Niebuhr does this indicates a conscious awareness of the American contribution to an empirical approach to God. Finally we have seen the great formative influence of Macintosh on Niebuhr's understanding of the empirical. Though Macintosh was a Canadian, he did his graduate work in theology and philosophy at the University of Chicago, and from 1909-42 he taught at Yale University; both facts constitute a degree of academic-naturalization for Macintosh. And even if Macintosh's empirical theology shows a strong neo-Kantian orientation, his insistence on the empirical is right in line with the American empirical school of philosophy. In fact, in some ways Macintosh's moral optimism is a type of pragmatism.[1]

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[1] Niebuhr's interest in the human activity of faith is seen especially in The Meaning Revelation, Radical Monotheism and Western Culture (New York: Harper & Row, Harper Torchbook, 1970) (hereafter abbreviated as RMWC), and in The Responsible Self. There are also two unpublished manuscripts on faith; Knowledge as Faith (worked on during 1946-47) and Faith on Earth (worked on from 1952-58). Niebuhr's interest in theological ethics is attested to by his teaching career at Yale University where he taught theological ethics from 1931-62.

Niebuhr's final formulation of what the empirical in theology means is not the same as the American influences on his thought, but it does seem that Niebuhr can claim a place alongside other theologians who take seriously the human experience of God and who scrutinize this. We now need to see how

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[1] Macintosh does consider his empirical theology as pragmatic, but he is very careful to distinguish his empirical theology from pragmatism: "Theology as an empirical science would be at the same time a pragmatic theology, no doubt; but not all pragmatic theology, even when it is carefully critical, amounts to theology as an empirical science. . . . If we cannot have a scientific theology, then an eclectic theology, constructed on the principles of a critical religious pragmatism, will be, theoretically at least, in spite of its great practical difficulties in application, the best method available. But a scientific theology would be much better." Theology as an Empirical Science, pp. 24-25.

Niebuhr distinguished himself from other American empirical theologians and how he developed his own brand of "empirical" theology.[1]

II. Niebuhr's "Critical Realism": A Type of "Empirical" Theology

In 1930 H. Richard Niebuhr began to distinguish himself from the type of empirical theology with which he had associated himself until this time. Two reasons seem to be behind this move on Niebuhr's part. The first reason is much more proximate to the 1930 date; it is connected with Niebuhr's eight-month sabbatical leave in Germany. The trip to Germany and the preparatory reading he did for this trip brought Niebuhr into immediate contact with the thought of Karl Barth and the thought of Paul Tillich.[2] The second reason for Niebuhr to distinguish his kind of empirical theology from other kinds

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[1] When a person attempts to define the word "empirical," it becomes apparent how equivocal a term it is, especially when used as a designation for a kind of theology. We will not attempt to define empirical theology here; we refer the reader to the comments of Schubert M. Ogden and John B. Cobb in The Future of Empirical Theology, edited by Bernard E. Meland, Vol. 7, Essays in Divinity (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969) pp. 65-101. It may seem strange to describe Niebuhr as an empirical theologian. Yet it will become apparent that part of Niebuhr's interest in the experiential dimensions of faith was to pursue theology in an empirical fashion. However we must recognize that Niebuhr's understanding of "empirical," as well as of "critical realism," is distinct from the empirical theology of a Wieman and the critical realism of a Sellars. To avoid a misleading use of these titles when referring to Niebuhr's position, we will keep them in quotation marks throughout this section.

[2] Fowler, To See the Kingdom, p. 4; p. 54.

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in 1930 is more remote to this date; it has to do with Niebuhr's rootage in the general Christian tradition which caused him, throughout the 1920's, to question some of the conclusions of empirical theology which he encountered then. In 1930 his reading of Barth and Tillich resonated with the orthodox chords of Niebuhr's thought and gave him incentive to pursue his interest in empirical theology in a way consonant with orthodox Christianity.

We have already noted two instances of Niebuhr's hesitancy over some of the conclusions of an empirical approach to religious experience. The first came at the end of his first article, "An Aspect of the Idea of God in Recent Thought"; here he referred to the mystery of the cross as a corrective of some of the emphases he found in empirical thought on religion. The second instance came at the end of his 1929 article on moral relativism where he spoke of the faith and trust of Jesus in God and the importance of the resurrection for "verifying" the cross.[1] Both of these instances come out of the faith tradition of Christianity and not from an "empirical" approach to religion. In an article in 1925 Niebuhr indicated a sympathy for some of the ideas of neo-orthodoxy before, it seems, he had read Barth; this article documents the fact that Niebuhr's foundation in the orthodox Christian faith was firm and that this tradition had a strong impact on him.[2]

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[1] See the citations pp. 60 and 89-90, above.

[2] In commenting on the values of Benedictine monasticism Niebuhr speaks of a "practical dualism" in an attempt to speak about the otherness of God: "All efforts to define the world

To call Niebuhr's theological position which he came to in the 1930's a "critical realism" and an instance of a type of "empirical" theology may be misleading because it is not the same "realism" which Troeltsch and Macintosh expound, and it is not "empirical" in the way the thought of Dewey or Wieman is. We choose to use these titles at this point not to brand Niebuhr's thought with an "ism," a practice which he himself would have abhorred and abjured; rather, we use these titles of Niebuhr's thought to indicate that the theological position to which Niebuhr came in 1930 is, in his view, not only orthodox but also experiential. Whether or not, in the final judgment, we can say that Niebuhr's "orthodoxy" is "empirical" is not at issue here; what we are trying to demonstrate is that Niebuhr was self-consciously developing a theological position which he considered to be empirical and, at the same time, to be acceptable to the universal Christian tradition.

As we see it, the problem over using these titles to describe Niebuhr's mature position has to do with the problem of nature versus supernature. In contemporary times we find some banter about phrases such as "supernaturalism" or "naturalism" to describe a thinker's theological position. Often these people

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monistically have only succeeded in reducing the spiritual to the level of the material; and all this worldliness, despite its high claim of bringing the other world into the present sphere, has only succeeded in banishing the spiritual realm from human thought. Dualism is perhaps not so discredited a philosophical doctrine as the fashion in thought would have us believe; at all events a practical dualism is emerging out of the critical antithesis modern men experience between the ideal and the real," H. Richard Niebuhr, "Back to Benedict," The Christian Century 42 (1925): 860-61.

either end up missing the point of the person's thought, or end up taking a defensive position towards that thought, a posture which itself prohibits a fair reading of the other's thought. Such a use of language is totally inimical to Niebuhr's thought.

Yet his thought is susceptible to this mistreatment. For in the 1930's he was trying to forge a synthesis between the orthodox Christian view of God and an empirical understanding of God. To some, Niebuhr's reliance on an orthodox Christian view of God can be said to be supernaturalistic; to others, his reliance on an empirical view of God can be said to be naturalistic. However, a strong use of the words "nature" and "supernature," in a way which puts each at the extremity of the other, is not helpful in understanding the theological synthesis at which Niebuhr arrived in the 1930's. Niebuhr is not a "supernaturalist" in the sense of that word which means that God acts magically and can intervene in a way contrary to the process of creation; nor is Niebuhr a "naturalist" in the sense of that word which means that God is to be equated with the process of creation and that there is no "revelation" other than coming to know clearer the direction and meaning of the natural processes.

There are three places in Niebuhr's writings from the 1930's wherein he self-consciously distinguished his own brand of "empirical" theology from other American empirical theologies. These three pieces will become the basis of our analysis for the rest of this section.[1]

A. American Religious Realism versus German Religious Realism

The first written indication that Niebuhr was consciously considering a modification of the empirical approach to theology, which he had learned in part from his study of American thinkers, came in an article whose very title expresses Niebuhr's own questioning of empirical theology, viz., "Can German and American Christians Understand Each Other?"[2] Though Niebuhr's main concern in this article was not to analyze and criticize American empirical theology, he did develop a description of "American religion" which he counterposed to a description of "German religion" and which can be broadened to include non-ecclesial thought on religion by American thinkers. Since these descriptions are of the Christian religion, Niebuhr identified them with the works of men who were associated with Christian churches.[3] Yet even if he did not identify these descriptions with men who were representative of American and

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[1] The three articles are: HRN, "Religious Realism in the Twentieth Century"; "Translator's Preface," found in Paul Tillich, The Religious Situation (New York and Cleveland: The World Publishing Co., Living Age Book, Meridian Books, 1956), pp. vii-xxii; and "Value Theory and Theology," The Nature of Religious Experience: Essays in Honor of Douglas Clyde Macintosh, edited by J. S. Bixler, R. L. Calhoun, and H. R. Niebuhr (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1937), pp. 93-116.

[2] The Christian Century 47 (1930): 914-16.

[3] Niebuhr connects the "social gospel" of Walter Rauschenbusch and Washington Gladden with the description of American religion; he connects the neo-orthodoxy of Karl Barth with German religion.

German philosophical thought on religion, it seems that in the case of Niebuhr's description of American religion this description has reference also to non-ecclesial thinkers in America who had expressed their views on religion. This conclusion is warranted by the fact that Niebuhr saw the distinguishing characteristic of American religion as its anthropocentric orientation and as its concern with ethics. Both of these characteristics are not the sole province in American religious thought of Church theologians. Many American thinkers who are related in varying degrees to an established Christian church or who are in no way connected with official Christianity, have commented on the ethical activity of mankind and the part religious belief plays in motivating men to right living. Niebuhr had already met this non-ecclesial thought both in William James, who had not restricted his thought on religion to a Christian tradition, and in D. C. Macintosh who was more explicitly Christian but in a way that was not bound to an ecclesial tradition.

Niebuhr's own concern in this article was to prevent the differences between the theocentric emphasis in German theology and the anthropocentric emphasis in American religion from developing into an "either-or-ism."[1] In Niebuhr's view, such a procedure would only lead to provincialism and to absolutizing something that is relative. What interests us here is how

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[1] Another article by Niebuhr written at this time has the same theme of trying to prevent an either-or attitude to religion and ethics; see H. Richard Niebuhr, "Religion and Ethics," The World Tomorrow 13 (November 1930): 443-46.

Niebuhr described the provincialism he saw shaping up in the American religion of his time.

> If anywhere a provincial relativism threatens American religion it is in its tendency toward a pure activism, degenerating at times into an exclusive and febrile passion for shortsighted reforms and into a Jesuitical acceptance of any means which will gain the desired end. Furthermore, this interest in measurable activity and in tangible results threatens to betray us into an anthropocentric, this-worldly, planetary provincialism which forgets that man may also be a citizen of heaven and that apart from his urge to identify himself with some transcendent meaning his being and even his ethical and social interests lose all ultimate significance.[1]

Niebuhr saw a need to modify this anthropocentric provincialism with a theocentric corrective. What is important to note is that Niebuhr did not repudiate the anthropocentric interest of American religion; rather, he sought to correct it with a doctrine of God.[2]

The way out of an either-or attitude to God and ethics is in Niebuhr's view to seek a way beyond the provincial attitudes of either a solely anthropocentric theology or a solely theocentric theology. That way is the path of realism.

> The way out of the impasse appears to lie only in a realism which will apprehend in all their stubborn actuality the facts of history and the fact of God; which will neither substitute a romantic idea of natural man for the petty and ignoble creature whom our novelists have so often seen and described better than our theologians and which will not replace the God with whom the soul struggles, God the enemy and God the ultimate reality with some man-made deity, some projection of the wish or the social whole.[3]

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[1] HRN, "Can German and American . . . ," p. 914.

[2] Niebuhr's own comment on this period, given late in his life confirms our judgment. HRN, "Reformation: Continuing Imperative," p. 248, quoted in footnote one, p. 53, above.

[3] HRN, "Can German and American . . . , p. 915.

In this article Niebuhr began to elaborate the meaning of this realism by briefly expounding some of the ideas of Paul Tillich. In "Religious Realism and the Twentieth Century" Niebuhr will develop more fully his own version of this realism which we have entitled "critical realism." Before analyzing this article and describing what Niebuhr means by "critical realism," we need to highlight the significance for Niebuhr of the other thinker who is alluded to in the quotation just cited.

The thinker, to whom Niebuhr alluded here but does not name, is Alfred North Whitehead. The allusion Niebuhr made is a paraphrase of a quotation which he will use several times in his later writings.[1] The quotation from Whitehead is: "it [religion] is the transition from God the void to God the enemy, and from God the enemy to God the companion."[2] Two remarks need to be made concerning Niebuhr's use of this quotation from Whitehead. The first remark is that Niebuhr's use of this quotation in no way identifies Niebuhr with process philosophy and theology; Niebuhr was not a process philosopher or theologian. The second remark is that though Niebuhr was not a process philosopher or theologian he nonetheless was interested in the processes of transition; this interest marks off Niebuhr as an empirical theologian.

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[1] This quotation is the most used quotation from another man's writings in Niebuhr's own writing. This is a singular honor in Niebuhr's writing, for Niebuhr is the type of writer who does not often quote others. I do not think that any special significance should be attributed to this other than that the phrase served Niebuhr as a handy catch-phrase. The repetition of this quotation in Niebuhr's writing does not indicate any strong influence of Whitehead on Niebuhr. Other places in Niebuhr's writings where it is used are: "Theology in a Time of Disillusionment," p. 16; KGA, p. 192; in "Faith in Gods and in God," reprinted in RMWC, p. 123; and in the introduction to Chapter 9, "John Calvin," in Christian Ethics: Sources of the Living Tradition, edited by Waldo Beach and H. Richard Niebuhr (New York: Ronald Press, 1955), p. 269.

[2] Alfred North Whitehead, Religion in the Making (Cleveland: World Publishing Co., Living Age Book, Meridian Books, 1960), p. 16.

The full implication of Niebuhr's interest in the processes of transition can be seen in the way he used the Whitehead quotation in a lecture Niebuhr gave to the alumni at Yale University in 1931. In this lecture he was talking about what theology must do in a time of disillusionment; he relied very heavily on Barth to explain a theological concept of "disillusionment." Niebuhr however combined the negative elements of Barth's crisis theology with the quotation from Whitehead. "It is the virtue of this Barthian theology that it has rediscovered the religious significance of the void. . . . This theology reminds us, as Whitehead also does, that religion is transition from God the void to God the enemy and from God the enemy to God the companion, but access to the companion may be too cheaply purchased to be real where it is not gained by way of the void and of the enemy."[1]

In this quotation we see Niebuhr affirming the negative force of Barth's theology which so clearly stated the otherness of God. Niebuhr however was interested in more than just a theoria of God the void which, as we will see below, Niebuhr saw leading to a type of agnosticism if pursued single-mindedly as Barth did. Niebuhr was also interested in a theoria of God the enemy and God the companion. In Niebuhr's thought this theorizing on God the enemy and God the companion takes expression as a study of the human faith-response and a study of theological ethics; Niebuhr saw these areas as places where we can "empirically" know God, i.e., through the moral adjustment of man to God. He will not however say anything about God in his study of these "empirical" data other than what is known through the faith relationship; unlike process theologians and process philosophers he did not speculate about process in the Godhead.

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[1] HRN, "Theology in a Time of Disillusionment," p. 16.

But we do find that Niebuhr was interested in more than just a denial of any human experience of divinity; he did think that through the method of "critical realism" we can scientifically study the human response to God as God revealed himself in the processes of creation. Though Niebuhr at this time modified his "empirical" theology with a strong conviction of the independent reality and priority of God to all human experience, he did think that one could speak positively about the human adjustment to this sovereign God.

1. "Religious Realism and the Twentieth Century"

The easiest way to understand the meaning of Niebuhr's "empirical" theology is to see how he distinguished his theology from the empirical theologies of D. C. Macintosh and H. N. Wieman whose thought Niebuhr included under the rubric "American religious realism." Niebuhr used the phrase "American religious realism" to open his article "Religious Realism and the Twentieth Century." Though he did not name any representative thinkers who are part of American religious realism, we have surmised that Niebuhr was referring to Macintosh and Wieman in this article.

The evidence for designating Macintosh as one of the American religious realists about whom Niebuhr was speaking in this article is more conclusive than for designating Wieman as such. As we saw above, Niebuhr was influenced very heavily by Macintosh's empirical theology; it was under Macintosh's guidance that Niebuhr developed a sense for critical realism. The fact that Niebuhr's article appears in an anthology edited by Macintosh, entitled Religious Realism, also indicates that Niebuhr had Macintosh in mind. The case for Wieman as one of the thinkers whom Niebuhr included under the rubric "American religious realism" is less evident. Niebuhr had been reading some of Wieman's works at this time; this fact is documented by a short book review done by Niebuhr on Wieman's The Issues of Life,[1] The fact that Wieman also had an article in Macintosh's anthology may also indicate Wieman as one of those whom Niebuhr called an American religious realist. As we will see below, Niebuhr in 1937 explicitly criticized both Macintosh and Wieman and, in doing so, distinguished his "empirical" theology from theirs.

In 1932 Niebuhr was also distinguishing his theological position from "American religious realism" in his article

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[1] Yale Divinity News 28 (1931).

"Religious Realism and the Twentieth Century." This article is a curious blend in that it contains Niebuhr's criticism not only of American religious realism but also of German religious realism. Niebuhr was carrying out in a more analytical fashion in this article what he had already suggested in the article "Can German and American Christians Understand Each Other?" viz., seeking a way beyond an either-or-ism, the way which he there called "realism."

The structure of the 1932 article "Religious Realism and the Twentieth Century"is threefold. First, Niebuhr described the common foe of both American religious realism and German religious realism, viz., the idealistic and subjectivistic tendencies of nineteenth-century theology. Then he went on to analyze some of the elements of American religious realism. Finally, Niebuhr described the realism of Barth and Tillich wherein Niebuhr, on the one hand, offered some of his own critique of Barth and Tillich and, on the other hand, used the theocentric emphases of Barth and Tillich to correct American religious realism. It is important to note that, though Niebuhr was aware of the divergence between American religious realism and German religious realism, he saw them united on their realistic stance, viz., "a common objectivistic interest and a general critical character."[1] Niebuhr's own interest was to develop the theological significance of this realism; his theological development of "critical realism" became the basis for the mature expression of Niebuhr's doctrine of God.

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[1] HRN, "Religious Realism . . . ," p. 413.

In Niebuhr's view, subjectivistic and idealistic tendencies of the nineteenth-century liberal theology took on the characteristics of an "anthropocratic" attitude and of an "anthropocentric" attitude, both of which resulted in an optimism of "expansion and increased control of nature" in which "the problem of evil assumed no tragic guise."[1] The "anthropocentric" attitude placed man at the center of reality, thus reversing the Copernican revolution; and the "anthropocratic" attitude gave vent to the human ambition and presumption that everything is subject to human control. Theologically these attitudes meant that religion was to be equated with the religious subject.

> Thus religion and theology were subject-centered; they were valued not as revelations or systematizations of reality nor as efforts to transcend the limits of reason and of humanity but as aids in the struggle for existence, in the self-assertion of the human spirit, in the control of life.[2]

The realism of both American and German theology in the twentieth century was a move away from the subject-centered theology of the nineteenth century.

> This realism is rooted in experiences no less significant than those which gave rise to anthropocentrism and idealism. If the latter represented the attitude of a youthful and ebullient individualism, then realism may be said to be the world-view of democracy which has come of age and which faces its problems with critical eyes. If idealism was the philosophy of a scientific age which gloried in the power of the human mind, then realism appears to be the attitude of a matured science which understands its limitations and the stark givenness of the facts which it seeks to understand. If idealism and the anthropocratic spirit were characteristic of a period of economic and political

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[1] Ibid., p. 416.

[2] Ibid., pp. 415-416.

> expansion and victory, then realism expresses the point of view of a time which has learned that failure is no less symptomatic of reality than triumph, decline no less significant of process than is progress.[1]

Thus a more matured reflection on the achievements of the human mind has repeated "the Copernican revolution with its dethronement of man and has increased the capacity for wonder in the face of a cosmos which is far less easily reduced to the terms of everyday experience."[2] Niebuhr saw several common characteristics in the divergent forms realism assumed in the twentieth century; they are: "The independence of the object, the subordination of mind to this independent reality, the fresh approach to values, the critical apprehension of the problem of evil and the rejection of a monistic assumption in metaphysics."[3]

Niebuhr recognized that there was a variety of religious realisms in the twentieth century; he did not find this divergence to be a negative feature of realism. Rather he saw that the variety "promises interaction, mutual criticism and the consequent development of a more adequate theory than an isolated school of thought can present."[4] Niebuhr chose from this variety the schools of American and German religious realism, and he put them in dialogue with each other. He used German religious realism both as a tool to compare the common tendencies in both traditions and as a tool to criticize the American movement from a theocentric point of view.

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[1] Ibid., pp. 416-417.

[2] Ibid., p. 417.

[3] Ibid., p. 418.

[4] Ibid., p. 419.

In developing his analysis of German religious realism Niebuhr raised the question whether or not from a purely epistemological point of view German religious religious realism can be called "realistic"; the German brands of "realism" were very closely associated with critical idealism and phenomenology. However, Niebuhr thought that both the theology of crisis of Barth and the realism of Tillich could be considered "realistic" by the fact that "in common reaction against nineteenth-century humanism their interest lies in the claim to the objectivity of God and in the transfer of the center of religion from the subject to the object."[1] Niebuhr then proceeded to analyze the theology of crisis of Barth and the faith-realism of Tillich.

The basic element of realism which Niebuhr found in the theology of crisis was its "effort to distinguish the reality of God from all ideas about him, from all experience of him, from all natural theology, and to define revelation in wholly non-psychological terms."[2] Though Niebuhr agreed with this kind of realism as expressed by Barth, Niebuhr thought that the Barthian emphasis on God's transcendence and on objectivism in theology was an extreme expression of the kind of theocentric realism which Niebuhr wished to expound.

On account of this extreme form of realism in Barth's theology, Niebuhr expressed some heavy criticism of Barth. Niebuhr found that Barth's method was "fundamentally inimical to its realistic interest." On Niebuhr's understanding of Barth's method, the method of crisis theology relegated all religious experience and all critical analysis of this experience to the realm of subjectivism. After reducing all human experience of God to subjectivism, crisis theology "succeeds only in arriving at a Kantian agnosticism in which God remains forever unknown. To rescue itself from this position it must fall back . . . upon an authoritarian dogmatism . . . .In effect, therefore, the theology of crisis is not so much a realism as a complete dualism which tends to become a dogmatism."[1]

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 420

[2] *Ibid.*

Prior to this article Niebuhr had already criticized Barth in several places. Niebuhr's first criticism of Barth comes in _The Social Sources of Denominationalism_.[2] In 1930 Niebuhr also had criticized an either-or-ism in ethics and religion; though he did not mention Barth it seems his consideration of the extreme of theism implied a neo-orthodox position: "A theology of pure transcendence eventually becomes a theology without content; it stops where it begins—with the assertion of divine transcendence. But if it seeks to make religion effective in the individual or the social life, it will inevitably associate itself with ethics."[3]

The lack of reference of Barthianism to ethics was what Niebuhr also took to task in "Theology in a Time of Disillusionment." Though Niebuhr agreed here with the way the theology of crisis pointed out "God the void" in all human efforts, he did not share with it the attitude which delivered "this whole world with its institutions and social arrangements into the hands of the devil."[1] Niebuhr's criticism was even more sharply put in "The Social Gospel and the Mind of Jesus": "Barthianism ultimately can have no social gospel because its God not only transcends every self, so that no self, individual or social, can regard himself or itself as the divine avenger or Messiah,--which is the true religious meaning of transcendence, I believe,--but because God transcends history itself. It has no faith in the God who is that which it is, and who is the dynamic force moving toward glory. Its God is a mere transcendent point."[2]

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[1] _Ibid_., pp. 420-421, _passim_ [2] Pp., 275-277.

[3] HRN, "Religion and Ethics," p. 444.

Niebuhr found the theocentric realism of Tillich a much more satisfactory kind of religious objectivism than that of Barth. Tillich not only expressed a crisis theology in his thought, in that he was quite critical of nineteenth-century liberal theology and its survival into the twentieth century;[3]

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[1] P. 19.

[2] HRN, "The Social Gospel and the Mind of Jesus," pp. 21-22. A very trenchant statement of a criticism by Niebuhr against Barth comes in "Value Theory and Theology," p. 111.

[3] In "Translator's Preface" to The Religous Situation, Niebuhr expands on the critical quality of Tillich's thought: "Back of this book is the conviction that modern civilization is not only on trial but that it has been judged and found wanting and that in the struggle for a new world more is at stake than the discovery of new political and economic organizations which will enable the West or humanity, for that matter, to survive a while longer" (pp. 9-10).

Tillich also was interested in the cultural, experiential manifestation of the divine. The ways in which Tillich developed the critical principle then was to see the cultural manifestations of the divine as existential judgments on man's autonomous or heteronomous impulses; in other words, revelation was the historical manifestation of what is essentially hidden and inaccessible. In contrast to his judgment on the realism of Barth, Niebuhr appreciated the effort of Tillich's "beliefful realism"[1] to place the emphasis on the "apprehension of God in the present" and its desire to understand "history not by means of an impossible attempt to transplant ourselves into some remote past but by a resolute effort to wrest from contemporary experience its ultimate significance and revelational value."[2]

Niebuhr recognized that Tillich's religious realism is not based on epistemological grounds but on its "general interest in objectivistic,non-romantic attitudes." Niebuhr gave two examples of this non-epistemological interest which could be called "realistic." The first was an "aesthetic realism" whose interest in keeping the objects independent

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[1] "Beliefful realism" is the translation which Niebuhr gave to Tillich's phrase "Gläubiger Realismus." The term is to be understood negatively and positively. Negatively, it is a reaction to nineteenth-century liberal theology whether in the form of "beliefless realism" or in the form of idealism. Positively, it has to do with Tillich's understanding of history as the "present," which is expressive of the Unconditioned; this understanding is known in Tillich's terminology as "Kairos."

[2] HRN, "Can German and American . . .," p. 916.

"from subjugation to utilitarian categories did not exclude an experience in which the object and the human mind interact; the emphasis was on the human experience and apprehension of "things as independent powers, as individualities, as existences which possess a sort of 'mana'-like quality capable of calling forth wonder and appreciation in the beholder." The second instance of a non-epistemological base for Tillich's realism was "historical realism" which was directed to the knowledge of the "unique event and the individual being."[1]

It was difficult however to separate "aesthetic" and "historical" realism from some kind of epistemological assumptions. Niebuhr recognized this. It is at this point we find Niebuhr expressing some reservations about Tillich's epistemology. Tillich's epistemological base was "critical idealism"; Niebuhr was inclined to a more realistic epistemology. We find Niebuhr critical of Tillich's "idealism" in this article; this fact implied that Niebuhr wanted to forge a position beyond critical idealism, viz., a position more realistic than Tillich's. It is this position which Niebuhr called "critical realism."

Niebuhr saw Tillich's critical "idealism" coming to expression in the way it attended "to the functions of the mind," and in the way it sought "truth by defining . . . norms [of the mind] rather than by turning to an objective world with which the mind deals." Yet Tillich also attempted to go "beyond neo-Kantian and phenomenological analysis in seeking to apprehend the content as well as the forms of mental functions and in trying to do justice to the individual and creative as well as to the formal elements to be found in them." Niebuhr found that Tillich's effort to give content to the religious a priori made Tillich's critical idealism "strain hard at the limits imposed upon it by the Kantian tradition and to incline its theory of knowledge more and more toward a realism comparable with that of the Anglo-Saxon countries."[1]

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[1] HRN, "Religious Realism . . .," p. 421.

Niebuhr's hesitancy over Tillich's idealistic origins seems to express Niebuhr's own hesitancy over his own neo-Kantian origins. And Niebuhr's observation on how Tillich's interest in the individual historical event and in the objective quality of the divine caused a tension in Tillich's thought, which strained again its Kantian bonds, seems to indicate Niebuhr's own awareness of a tension between idealism and empiricism in his own thought. On the one hand, Niebuhr saw the kind of theological realism, which Tillich's position represented, paying more heed to the historical event and to the objective reality of the divine outside human experience than did either the theocentric approach of Barth's realism and the anthropocentric approach of American religious realism.[2] Yet, on the other hand, Niebuhr recognized that the experience of the divine reality depended on the quality, or category, of the mind of the human knower which allowed the human individual to be receptive to the experience of the divine. This quality is like Troeltsch's religious a priori, Macintosh's religious need, Tillich's concept of religion as the existential understanding of the Unconditional; all of these conceptions build on a Kantian dualism which distinguishes between the formal character of mind of the knower and the independent reality of the thing itself.

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[1] Ibid., p. 422.

[2] "At this point two significant differences between American and German realism emerge; the latter is more historical in its point of view, more aware of the connection of the present with the past, and it is more objective, in so far as it gives

It becomes apparent that Niebuhr never quite completely overcame a Kantian dualism in his own thought. On the one hand, we find him in the article, "Religious Realism in the Twentieth Century," insisting that our experience of the divine is not just a formal category of the mind projected by the mind but also the Godhead itself made knowable--it is somehow experiential and even empirical, insofar as it can be verified. On the other hand, Niebuhr used the theological idea of the otherness of God from Tillich and Barth which grew out of a Kantian dualism to criticize American religious realism which Niebuhr, it seems, equated with monistic empiricism.[1] On the one hand,

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little attention to the subject's adjustment to God and emphasizes the Divine Object's invasion of human life." HRN, "Can German and American . . . ," p. 916.

[1] We have identified "American religious realism" with Macintosh and Wieman. It should be noted Macintosh's "empirical" theology is in part neo-Kantianism; Wieman's "empirical" theology is empiricism in the Anglo-Saxon tradition. Niebuhr's criticism of "American religious realism" then applies to each of these in different ways. He rejects Macintosh's equating "God" with a pre-conceived idea of religious value; he rejects Wieman's equating "God" with the valuing process of creation. We shall examine below in greater detail Niebuhr's explicit criticism of each of these thinkers.

then, Niebuhr distinguished his position from Tillich's by using the phrase "critical realism," whereas he spoke of Tillich's method as "critical idealism"; the implication is that Niebuhr's position is more realistic and more empirically founded. On the other hand, we find Niebuhr criticizing the empirical basis of American religious realism by way of Kantian dualism; he distinguished his position from American religious realism by calling it "critical" and not "empirical" realism. Part of the reason for this entanglement of metaphysical dualism and epistomological realism which we see in Niebuhr's thought is the fact that Niebuhr resolutely opposed a metaphysical monism either of an empirical kind or of an idealistic kind; yet he never developed his own metaphysical position.

In his refusal to propound a metaphysical conception of God Niebuhr is like Barth. If we are to know God it is in the way God wills. The difference between Barth and Niebuhr is not over the "otherness" of God but over the way we know him. Barth relied on a concept of revelation which in its refusal to examine religious experience broader than revelation, on Niebuhr's view, led to dogmatism. Niebuhr said that our experience of the divine is part of the way all persons come to know. Faith is part of epistemology. We will see in Chapter Six how Niebuhr elaborated the epistemological implications of faith. It is enough to note here that the word "faith" has the meaning for Niebuhr of "trust" and "loyalty" as well as "assent" to truth.

In "Religious Realism in the Twentieth Century" Niebuhr's major criticism of American religious realism is that it is not

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sufficiently critical of itself; it does not have enough Kantian hesitation over what it considers to be objective and empirical.

> For the point of view of German realism the American movement seems to be insufficiently critical of the empirical. This criticism may be directed primarily against all that sort of religious realism which seeks to derive a religious content from the experience of nature rather than from religious experience and does so by ignoring unduly the actuality of evil and chaos in the experience of the external world and by sacrificing important religious values which are to be found in faith but not in the natural theology based on such empiricism.[1]

American religious realism is too much concerned with interpreting the religious experience and, as a result, forgets the objective reality outside the experience. Such a realism, "which does not recognize the dualism resident in religious experience and therefore neglects the factor of faith by means of which the reference to the transcendent is made and so confuses the object in experience with that which experience intends, appears to be insufficiently critical and in danger of falling back into subjectivism.[2]

The result of this lack of criticism in American religious realism, on Niebuhr's view, is that this kind of realism did not overcome completely the anthropocentric and anthropocratic attitudes of nineteenth-century liberal theology.

> [It remains] very much under the influence of a progressive and technological era which is interested in knowledge for the sake of power and which, in religion, is prone to define

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[1] HRN, "Religious Realism . . . ," p. 424.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 425.

> God in terms of his utilizable relations to the neglect of his uniquely divine or holy character. Hence it tends to define religion in terms of adjustment to divine reality for the sake of gaining power rather than in terms of revelation which subject the recipient to the criticism of that which is revealed.[1]

In the end result for Niebuhr, this uncritical attitude on the part of American religious realism leads it to an individualism because it does not pay sufficient heed to historical revelation and because it is not sufficiently critical of an individual's apperception of the divine. Its optimism about the availability of God in experience leads it to abstract the experience from its historical context and to universalize the availability of God in a way which does not seem warranted to Niebuhr.

> Abstracting the experiencer from his cultural conditions he [the American realist] ascribes to the content of experience a universal availability and validity which it does not possess since it is in fact relative to a particular historical nexus. The result is either the universalization of Christian theology, which is regarded as available for all rational human beings because they are rational and human, or--what may amount to the same thing in the long run--the reduction of the content of theology to that which is abstracted from all particular historical connection, to the consensus of all religions or to a natural theology gained by a process of inferences from man's universal experience of nature, thought and morality.[2]

Niebuhr was using a concept of the radical otherness of God, which he had learned from the orthodox Christian tradition and which Barth had re-enforced, to criticize both those who extract a concept of God from "an experience of nature rather

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 425-26.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 427.

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than from religious experience"[1] (e.g., Wieman) and those who are insufficiently critical of their interpretation of religious experience (e.g., Macintosh). "As the Barthian theology would put it, our American religious realism fails to note the distinction between religion, as the universal human activity directed toward God, and Christianity, which is not a religion, but God's revelation of himself--the vertical entrance of the absolute into time."[2]

Niebuhr asked American religious realism to pay more heed to the historical cultural situation in which the religious experience arises, e.g., to be more critical of the experience of the divine, while at the same time upholding the radical independence of the object of this experience. In doing this, Niebuhr criticized American religious realism by the concept of the radical otherness of God while at the same time affirm-its position that God is experienced. In affirming that the otherness of God is experienced Niebuhr goes against Barth.

> The independence of God from experience does not imply his remoteness from experience; the relativity of historical experience does not imply the absence of an absolute content or point of reference; the presence of evil in more subtle and pervasive forms than is usually granted by American realism does not imply the absence of the good.

In the final result of Niebuhr's analysis of American and German religious realisms we find Niebuhr's own brand of religious realism. It is a realism which adamantly holds to the otherness of God independent of our experience of him while at the same time affirming the fact that this otherness is experienced by men and can be studied scientifically. It is empirical in that we can scientifically study the human faith response, that is, we can scrutinize the moral adjustment of human beings to this experience of the otherness of God by examining what it is they make their center of value.

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 424. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 427 [3] *Ibid.*, p. 428.

B. Niebuhr's Critique of Macintosh and Wieman

We have seen in Niebuhr's criticism of American religious realism that he was not interested in annihilating its realistic position; rather, he conceived of his criticism as furthering the cause of "empirical" theology. In an article written in 1937 he explicitly stated how his analysis of "the difficulties which have beset modern empiricism" contributes to the cause of "empirical" theology and "will carry forward the interests of American religious realism."[1]

In this article Niebuhr explicitly identified Macintosh and Wieman with "American religious realism." The article is a theological presentation of value-theory and religious experience which is both negative and positive to the value-approach to God. Niebuhr was critical of the value-approaches to God which Macintosh and Wieman had propounded; but in his critical attitude toward them he was also developing his own value-approach to God. As Niebuhr stated later in his life, he broke with the kinds of empirical theologies which these men present, not because of their interest in human moral activity but because of their inadequate use of value-theory to explain God.

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[1] HRN, "Value-Theory and Theology," p. 116.

> My fundamental break with the so-called liberal or empirical theology was not due to the fact that it emphasized human sovereignty; to interpret it in that way is to falsify it in unjustifiable fashion. It was rather due to the fact that it defined God primarily in value-terms, as the good, believing that good could be defined apart from God.[1]

Niebuhr's amicable attitude to Macintosh and Wieman can be seen in the way Niebuhr was careful in this article, "Value-theory and Theology," to point out how his criticism of value-theories about God did not apply to Macintosh and Wieman in the same way as it applies to other value-theories about God. In fact, Niebuhr recognized the fact that "American empiricism ––as represented particularly by Professors Macintosh and Wieman––arose in part as a protest against the dominance of value considerations in theology."[2] Niebuhr then went on to show how the value-approach to religious experience is deficient on three accounts—"on account of its scientific inadequacy, its religious inaccuracy, and its philosophical dubiety."[1] After presenting his analysis of this threefold inadequacy of value-theory and God, Niebuhr again paid tribute to Macintosh and Wieman as men who also have seen the same deficiencies of value-theory and theology.

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[1] HRN, "Reformation: Continuing Imperative," p. 248.

[2] HRN, "Value-Theory and Theology," p. 95. It should be noted that Niebuhr does realize that the empiricism of Macintosh and the empiricism of Wieman are quite distinct. He realizes that Macintosh is much more neo-Kantian and that Wieman is more empirical in the Anglo-Saxon meaning of that word. "In both instances––though less in the latter [Wieman] than in the former [Macintosh] ––empiricism is modified by an eclecticism and value takes precedence over being, despite the realistic interest. Empiricism––of the realistic sort––cannot be said to have emancipated itself from the value approach, though it is moving definitely in this direction" (pp. 96-97).

As we have seen above, Niebuhr is closely associated with Macintosh and knows him very well. It does not seem that Niebuhr knows Wieman as well. In this essay Niebuhr refers only to two works of Wieman, one of which is a short essay; these two works are "God and Value," in Religious Realism, the anthology edited by D. C. Macintosh and The Wrestle of Religion with Truth (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1927).

> Realistic empirical theology, as represented in Macintosh and Wieman, has recognized these objections. In its endeavor to adopt the disinterested method of the natural sciences, in its recognition of the requirements of religion, and in its acknowledgement of the relativity of values it has taken important steps toward the development of an adequate theological method.[2]

Niebuhr then went on to make the point that the "empirical" method which these men propounded had not been consistently applied by them; the implication of this disclaimer of Niebuhr is that his value-theology is more realistic and more "empirical." Niebuhr saw their method as (1) the use of the disinterested method of natural science; (2) recognition of the independent reality of the divine which is encountered in experience; and (3) the acknowledgement of the relativity of values. Niebuhr, however, did not think that either Macintosh or Wieman were consistent in applying these steps.

> Yet each of these steps remains incomplete, since values gained from non-religious experience are employed as the absolute criteria of theology. The completion of the steps requires the complete abandonment of an approach from values known as absolute prior to the experience of God. Only if this approach is abandoned can theology become truly disinterested, just to the requirements of religious experience, and philosophically consistent.[3]

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[1] HRN, "Value-Theory and Theology," p. 97.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 110.

[3] *Ibid.*

Before expounding on what Niebuhr considered to be a more consistent use of an empirical methodology, as exemplified in his own value-theory, we need to understand more clearly how Niebuhr distinguished himself from the value-theories of Macintosh and Wieman.

Niebuhr's basic criticism of the variety of value-theories about God, including Macintosh's and Wieman's, is that "they assume that men have a knowledge of absolutely valid values which is not only independent of their knowledge of God but which is also in some way determinative of God."[1]

The major part of Niebuhr's critique of the value-theories of Macintosh and Wieman comes in the section of this essay which deals with the philosophical inadequacies of value-theology. In this section he offered two major objections to value-theology.

The first objection has to do with the fact that value-theology, in seeking to avoid "dogmatism," ends up propounding a dogmatism. "A theology which seeks to evade the dogmas of religion by founding itself upon ethics does not evade dogmatism, since every ethics rests at last upon a dogmatic basis."[2] Though Niebuhr did not apply this criticism directly to Macintosh and Wieman, it does apply to them. For in this recognition, viz., that a theology based on values is itself dogmatic, Niebuhr was saying that in matters of religious experience dogma is unavoidable. If it is unavoidable then why not place the trust and commitment, which dogma demands, on the religious object and not on the value which one considers of importance? Niebuhr thought that Macintosh and Wieman place their confidence on a value-consideration rather than on the object of religious experience.

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[1] Ibid., p. 95.

Ibid., p. 105.

What Niebuhr meant by the unavoidableness of "dogma," put simply, is that, in matters of foundational importance, conviction and commitment are always involved. "Beginnings must be made and they can only be made in dogma." What Niebuhr objected to in most value-theologies is their claim that they are offering a basis for ethics and religious life which is not based on dogma whereas, on Niebuhr's view, their very basis for establishing a certain value as the criterion of the divine is a faith statement: ". . . the presence of dogma in ethics points to the fact that it cannot furnish a basis for religion since it is itself founded upon a religious faith."[1] Niebuhr wanted any value-based theology to recognize that, in determining whatever value it has decided on as paramount and in determining the initiating basis of and the criterion for the divine, it has already made a religious commitment. In doing so, it is only substituting one religion for another.

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[1] Ibid. In an article written for the Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences, Niebuhr gives a very balanced and considered view of "dogma." Recognizing the historical conditioning of dogma, Niebuhr points out that the immutability, universality and eternal validity for dogma comes from the immediate religious experience which the dogma defines. It also comes from the need for every theological and philosophical view to claim an axiomatic basis for itself. "Nevertheless, dogma as the report of religious experience or as the theological definition of religious axioms admits the relativity of all formulations and is quite distinct from dogma as the officially promulgated but historically conditioned doctrine of ecclesiastical institutions" (p. 191).

Niebuhr sees mutability and relativity in anything human. He makes a distinction between an expression of certainty and fidelity which comes from an individual faith experience and the expressions of certainty which derive their "immutability" from an authoritarian base. The latter is changeable as history shows; but the former also changes. What does not change for Niebuhr, a fact which is the basis of this analysis of dogma, is the Godhead who is the cause of the religious experience. H. Richard Niebuhr, "Dogma," Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences, edited by E. R. A. Seligman, vol. V.

> To found religion on such a basis or to criticize it by means of such a system of ethics is to found one religion upon another, or to argue in a circle, or to criticize one religion by means of another. It is not to found religion upon a wholly rational, undogmatic foundation or to criticize it by means of an impartial principle.[1]

Niebuhr wanted to push on to the ultimate basis of religious experience, to the truly foundational beginning of theology, which in his view is beyond any categorical need of the human mind. In other writings he called those positions polytheistic and henotheistic which placed their "dogmatic faith" in something less than what is foundational and prior to all human evaluation.[2]

The second philosophical inadequacy which Niebuhr found in value-theology is that it does not take seriously enough the principle of the relativity of values. In failing to heed the relativity of values two things happen to these theories. The first is "abstractionism." By this term Niebuhr meant that many value-theories, in trying to define the "oughtness" of certain values, separate the values in such a way from the experience of them that these values lose all concreteness which they have in actual life. "There can be no doubt of the absolute claim which truth and justice have upon men, but to abstract them from his nature and to call them valid apart from any being for whom they are valid, to say that _they_ ought to be, rather than that _man_ ought to be truthful and just, is to abandon the realm of experience and to enter into doubtful regions of metaphysical abstraction." The second result of not taking the principle of relativity of values seriously enough is the "exaltation of values recognized as relative to human structure into the final values of reality."[1]

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[1] *Ibid*., p. 106.

[2] See RMWC and also the unpublished sermon given in approximately the early 1930's, "When the Half-gods Go the Gods Arrive."

Niebuhr acknowledged the fact that both Macintosh and Wieman recognized the relativist position in value-theory. Yet he did not think that they took the principle of relativity seriously enough. In the case of Wieman, Niebuhr conceded that when Wieman defined "God as the structure which not only promotes and maintains but which constitutes value," he acknowledged that human values are not final but rather need to be integrated into an over-arching and all-inclusive system. "Nevertheless, human values remain the starting point of the system; it is required that these values be integrated in the system; and 'God is that in the universe which will yield maximum security and increase of human good.'"[2] In the case of Macintosh Niebuhr says:

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[1] HRN, "Value-Theory and Theology," p. 106.

[2] _Ibid_., p. 107.

> To make the values which are acknowledgedly relative to personality criteria of the divine is either to assume that the divine must be personal or to regard personality as the one wholly worshipful reality and God as a means to personal ends. To proceed from the values of persons to an integrated system of values, which overarches and includes them, is to assume a harmony of values similar to that one which liberalism assumed in the case of individuals and society.[1]

The content of Niebuhr's own value-theology begins to show at the end of his criticism of Macintosh and Wieman. Niebuhr did not reject the idea that there is an all-inclusive system which integrates values into a harmonious whole. "The confidence that such a harmony exists as a hidden reality and that, eventually, it will be made actual or apparent belongs to the essence of religious faith." Niebuhr rejected rather the uncritical identification of that harmony with something that exists in human experience right now; "that it is now so actual and apparent that one can begin with the values of the individual and proceed to declare the values of society identical with them, or with the values of the human person and proceed to the values of God is more than dubious."[2] Niebuhr's eschatological awareness, viz., the yet-to-be-ness of this harmony, plays an important role in his doctrine of God, as we shall see below.

In this essay Niebuhr went on to develop a value-theory; it seems that, in doing so, he considered his approach to be a more consistently empirical approach to religious experience than those approaches which Macintosh and Wieman propounded.

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[1] *Ibid*., p. 108.

[2] *Ibid*.

In developing his own value-theology, Niebuhr used a theological notion of crisis which he in part learned from Barth. The theological notion of crisis asserts "the absolute priority of God," and it rejects "the assumption that prior to God, or to God's revelation of himself, or man's experience of faith in him, the mind is in possession of a valid standard by means of which it can judge God and his revelation."[1] Niebuhr, however, went beyond this negative principle of crisis theology. Niebuhr realized that the inadequacy of elaborating a value-theology on the basis of value-presuppositions made _prior_ to religious experience does not preclude a value-theology which speaks of the values of the experience _after_ the fact of the divine entry into human experience. "It is possible and necessary to interpret religion as an affair of _valuation_ without assuming that such valuation must or can be made on the basis of a previously established standard of values."[2]

For Niebuhr the enduring contribution which empirical theology has brought to theology is to insist that the knowledge of God is available in the religious relation to him. Empirical theology is analogous to the Reformation, for it shows that the uniqueness of God is not something controlled by human experience.

> For while the Reformation contended against the fallacy of salvation by works, the new development was a reaction against the fallacies of salvation by belief, as in traditionalism, and of salvation by reason, as in rationalism. Religious knowledge has been shown to be unique, and this uniqueness has been shown to be due to the fact that it is a type of value-knowledge or valuation--as, indeed, all knowledge probably is.

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[1] _Ibid_., p. 111

[2] _Ibid_., pp. 111-12.

The uniqueness of religious knowledge is due to its having a value of a certain sort for man. Like art or morality, it has a meaning which can only be apprehended if one puts himself into its frame of reference.

> For as an action or a character may be known by the psychologist or historian without recognition of its goodness, or as a picture may be known by a chemist or a physicist without knowledge of its beauty, so the being which religion knows to be God may be known by philosophy, history or natural science without knowledge of its deity.[1]

The difference between Niebuhr's value-theology and other value-theologies lies in what Niebuhr called "objective relativism." Objective relativism recognizes the relativity of values without disregarding their objective character because it sees these values in relation to the structure and organic needs of reality and not in relation to the desire or consciousness of the human mind. What Niebuhr means by "structure and organic needs" seems to be reality as independent of human consciousness, viz., the empirical reality of things; but if this reality is to have value it must be in a relation to human consciousness and volition. "The value of deity would appear, on the basis of such a theory, to be quite independent of human desire and the consciousness of need, but not independent of the human constitution and its actual need. . . . It may be stated negatively by saying that, while the Being men call God exists independently of the creatures constituted to need him, it is not possible to define his Deity without reference to his relation to his creatures."[2]

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[1] *Ibid*., p. 112.

[2] *Ibid*., p. 113.

The objective reality of the deity then is not understood separately from the value of deity for the subject. "Deity" is not an abstraction. An idea of deity does not have the value of deity; ". . . a being is found to have the value of deity not as a separate quality but by virtue of those characteristics which enable it to fulfill the need for deity." The question for religion, on this view, is not whether God exists but rather what being or beings have the quality of deity. Religion then is the seeking for the reality which fulfills the need for deity in man, not the defining of God by a formal category or a value-consideration known prior to the religious experience.

> The question about the existence or non-existence of the gods is a false question. The true query of religion is, "Which among the available realities has the value of deity or has the potency of deity?" And this question turns into the other query, "Which reality has those characteristics which are the foundation of the value of deity, or which fulfill the human need for God?"[1]

The foundational religious need of man is not to be described in terms of man's "feelings when he experiences the satisfaction of the need;" nor is it to be equated with the need to have an object which corresponds to man's "feeling of dependence or his sense of the numinous."[2] In Niebuhr's description of this foundational religious need of man the emphasis is off an analysis of the activity of the human person and is on an awareness of the objective reality. As Niebuhr saw it, the religious need is the need for that which makes life worth living, a need which is only satisfied when men recognize themselves as valued by something outside themselves. "That has the value of deity for man which values man. The valuation of which man becomes aware in the religious experience is not first of all his evaluation of a being, but that being's evaluation of him." And in coming to know himself as valued, man may experience a negative evaluation of himself; he comes to know God as void and as enemy. Yet in coming to an awareness of "his disvalue", man "does not become aware of his unvalue;" man also experiences God as the companion who upholds all creation.[1]

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[1] Ibid., p. 114. Niebuhr makes this same observation in "Faith in Gods and in God," reprinted RMWC, p. 116, and in "The Question of the Church, in H. R. Niebuhr et al., The Church Against the World, (New York: Willett, Clark & Co., 1935), pp.2-3.

[2] HRN, "Value-Theory and Theology," p. 114.

Such a foundational religious experience is elemental; it is primordial and original. "It deals with that absolute source of all value by relation to which all other things have their value."[2] This absolute source of all value is not a value, that is, it is not a quality determined by a reference to some value known prior to an experience of it. It is the center of value which is not a value itself, but rather the source of value. The human experience of this reality does have a negative quality, i.e., it is critical of all human values and, as such, keeps man from absolutizing any human value; and it has a positive quality, i.e., it gives man confidence to pursue the best interests of man and nature. "The experience of the ground and source of all value leads to the criticism and reconstruction of the ethical system rather than to the support of one which has been accepted as absolute prior to the experience."[1]

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[1] Ibid., p. 115.

[2] Ibid. See H. Richard Niebuhr, "The Center of Value," RMWC (New York: Harper & Row, Harper Torchbook, 1970), pp. 100-13. This is a reprint of an essay with the same title in Moral Principles of Action, ed. R. N. Ashen (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1952), pp. 162-75.

Niebuhr concluded his analysis of value-theory and theology by stating what he considered the task of theology to be. The task is threefold: (1) . . . "the analysis of those characteristics by virtue of which a being has the value of deity for man, (2) the examination of reasons for the failure of religions which attach themselves to beings which do not possess these characteristics adequately, and (3) the description of the ultimate being, which as the supremely real and the source of all other being, is alone able by virtue of its character to satisfy the human need for God."[2] In his later writings, Niebuhr carried out this task, especially in The Meaning of Revelation and Radical Monotheism and Western Culture.

C. Summary

"Critical realism" as H. Richard Niebuhr used the term, indicates that Niebuhr understood himself to be, in some way, an "empirical" theologian. This conclusion is warranted from the fact that Niebuhr used the term to distinguish his "empirical" position from that of Macintosh and Wieman.

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[1] HRN, "Value-Theory and Theology," pp. 115-16.

[2] *Ibid*., p. 116. The enumeration has been added to the text.

The term "critical realism" in part indicates Niebuhr's rejection of an idealist epistemology. Niebuhr wanted to be realistically "empirical" in his study of theology. For him empirical theology, in part, means allowing the religious object, which is encountered in religious experience, to exist independent of the experience of it. On this account, Niebuhr's approach to religious experience is "realistic."

Niebuhr however realized that any human experience of the divine object and any articulation of this experience, either in doctrinal formulae such as church creeds or in philosophical speculation on it in metaphysics, is subject to criticism. As human experiences of the divine they are never expressions of the divine reality in itself. Niebuhr's basis of criticism of all human experience of the divine and of all human reflection on it is a theological notion of crisis which, in part, he picked up from Barth and which, in part, he inherited from the orthodox Christian tradition. To some, however, when Niebuhr made this criticism he was not going beyond a Kantian dualism insofar as Niebuhr's adherence to a revelation position can be said to be dualistic. Yet Niebuhr refused to state a metaphysical position which either defined God as a reality outside of human experience or defined him by equating the best in human experience with him. All he did was to point to the experience of the divine as the awareness of that which stands prior to all human experience and which judges all human and natural activity. On account of this theological idea of crisis, Niebuhr's approach to religious experience is "critical."

By using this theological notion of crisis to criticize the value-approaches to God which Macintosh and Wieman expound, each in his own way, Niebuhr thought he was being more empirical than either of them. For by letting God be, i.e., by not defining him in terms of anything known prior to an experience of him, we are being truly "empirical" in our approach to the religious experience. Letting-God-be does not mean for Niebuhr that God is not experienced. Quite the contrary. We do experience God. The task of theology is to analyze the experience, that is, theology can and should say much about the human side of the religious experience; but about God, the objective reality independent of human experience yet experienceable, theology must be silent. On this view, theology can study those characteristics by virtue of which a being has the value of deity, but it cannot study the divine being itself. Theology can also show the inadequacies of those religious approaches to God which make a being or several beings, lesser than that being which has the value of deity, their center of value. An awareness of idolatry will give us a sense for the truly tragic element in life, for it will expose the evil which results from placing an absolute trust and loyalty in something which is less than absolute.

CHAPTER THREE

STATEMENT OF NIEBUHR'S REALIST VIEW OF GOD AND CRITIQUE OF IT

I. "Doing Nothing": Niebuhr's Theological Formulation of His Doctrine of God

In 1932 there occurs in The Christian Century an exchange of articles between H. Richard Niebuhr and Reinhold Niebuhr; part of this exchange is a trenchant one-page rejoinder by H. Richard made in response to his brother's criticism of the article with which H. Richard initiated the public exchange of views between the two brothers.[1] This one-page reply is the mature formulation of H. Richard Niebuhr's belief about God; all other statements or metaphors which Niebuhr used in his later writings in speaking of God are contained in nuce in this reply. In a way, this one-page reply is analogous to a mathematical formula with which a great mathematical genius summarizes his thought; like the mathematical formula if this statement is thoroughly understood we have the key to understanding all other formulations by the thinker. In Niebuhr's case, this article is the key to all other formulations which Niebuhr gave to his doctrine of God. It is part of our thesis that this one-page document is the mature theological formulation which H. Richard Niebuhr gave to his doctrine of God; all further thought on God by Niebuhr in his other writings was an unpacking of the implications of this one-page article.

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[1] The series of articles and the response is in The Christian Century: H. Richard Niebuhr, "The Grace of Doing Nothing," The Christian Century 49 (1932): 378-80; Reinhold Niebuhr, "Must We Do Nothing?" The Christian Century 49 (1932): 415-17; H. Richard Niebuhr, "A Communication: The Only Way into the Kingdom of God," The Christian Century 49 (1932): 447. For a copy of the response see Appendix.

The public exchange of views between the Niebuhr brothers began with H. Richard's observations on the Sino-Chinese war. From this event H. Richard generalized a view which was his attempt to deal with the problem of evil which manifested itself in the Sino-Japanese War. This generalization was given the title-phrase, "the grace of doing nothing."[1] Niebuhr's generalization is in part informed by his understanding of "critical realism." As we saw, there was a gradual development of this understanding in Niebuhr's thought; "the grace of doing nothing" now appears as one of the blossoms of that development, or as a ripened fruit which symbolizes the whole growth-process which went into making it palatable.

This generalization, known as "the grace of doing nothing," applies to several important areas in the thought of H. Richard Niebuhr. We see at least four areas in Niebuhr's thought to which it applies: (1) a doctrine of man; (2) a doctrine of history; (3) a doctrine of God; and (4) a critical, realistic stance. In discussing these four areas and their relationship to the "grace of doing nothing," we will limit ourselves to an analysis of the exchange of articles between the Niebuhr brothers and to an analysis of two unpublished essays written at the same time.[1] These four areas are developed in many places in H. Richard Niebuhr's writings; for our purposes these articles serve to demonstrate how H. Richard's reply to Reinhold represents his mature thought on God, the result of a long process of development of an "empirical" theology in H. Richard Niebuhr.

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[1] James W. Fowler observes that the title of the article is not Niebuhr's: "On the typed carbon of the original manuscript, which is without title, Niebuhr noted in pencil that the title was supplied by the editor (as were the sub-titles and divisions of the article into sections)." Fowler, To See the Kingdom, p. 70. For our purposes it can serve here as the name for Niebuhr's generalization.

A. Doctrine of Man

The very phrase "doing nothing" implies a philosophical and theological anthropology, for it presupposes an ethical understanding of man which says that to do nothing has some moral value. At least for Niebuhr "doing nothing" has ethical implications, for in the opening sentence of his article H. Richard posed "doing nothing" as an ethical question. "It may be that the greatest moral problems of the individual or of a society arise when there is nothing to be done."[2]

"Doing nothing" is not the same as an attitude of fatefulness, viz., an attitude of sheer passivity and acquiescence in the face of a problem over which we have no control and over

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[1] The unpublished articles are "Theology in a time of Disillusionment," (1931) and "The Social Gospel and the Mind of Jesus," (1933).

[2] HRN, "The Grace of Doing Nothing," p. 378.

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which we cannot do anything.[1] Doing nothing is not the attitude of a habitual sinner whose recidivism has caused him "to give up." Rather "to do nothing" is a decision which has ethical and theological implications; it is an act of the human person who makes a choice.[2] Behind Niebuhr's understanding of doing nothing is a notion of free will which gives man responsibility for his actions but which does not give man ultimate control over the circumstances within which he makes his decisions. Man has a limited freedom in this view. When pared down to questions of ultimacy, e.g., problems over which we can do nothing, man is still forced to choose, to take responsibility. On this view of free will, man is not free not to will; rather he is free to choose between alternatives.[3] In matters of everyday affairs, this means that in moments of decision the failure to make a decisive choice becomes itself a decision. In matters of ultimacy, it means we either choose God or reject him.

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[1] To make a distinction between "doing nothing" and "not being able to do anything" may seem to be mere tautological chop-logic. The distinction however is real enough; the distinction is between a decision to "do nothing" and an attitude of despair. As we will see, "doing nothing" has some very hopeful, that is, eschatological, aspects to it in Niebuhr's thought.

[2] In the response to Reinhold Niebuhr's criticism of "The Grace of Doing Nothing," H. Richard points out that the issue does "not lie in the question of activity or inactivity . . . ; we are speaking after all of two kinds of activity." HRN, "A Communication . . . ," p. 447. Or as he says in "The Grace of Doing Nothing," ". . . is it really true that we are doing nothing? There are, after all, various ways of being inactive and some kinds of inactivity, if not all, may be highly productive. . . . When we do nothing we are also affecting the course of history. The problem we face is often that of choice between various kinds of inactivity rather than of choice between action and inaction" (p. 378).

[3] This view is close to that of Jonathan Edwards. It would be difficult to demonstrate a direct connection between Edwards and Niebuhr on this point; but it does show a basic empathy between the thought of both on the meaning of the freedom of human

In this article, Niebuhr posed the problem of doing nothing as a matter of ultimacy. For Niebuhr, it is at times like this that we are presented with a choice where to place our absolute loyalty and commitment. It is a moment of conversion, i.e., the decision in an individual's life which determines who his God is. Often people end up placing their trust in that which is less than absolute; they make idols. But if someone succeeds in pushing on beyond all human considerations and values, as Niebuhr did in stating the moral problem of doing nothing, this person is faced with God. The religious question which arises at this point is not, "Is there a God?' but rather it is, "How is faith in God possible?"[1]

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will. We do know from Niebuhr's writings after 1932 that he studied Edwards. See for example KGA, pp. 101-16; see also the introductory comments Niebuhr wrote about Edwards in Christian Ethics: Sources of the Living Tradition, edited by Waldo Beach and H. Richard Niebuhr (New York: The Ronald Press Co., 1955), pp. 380-89; and see H. Richard Niebuhr, "The Anachronism of Jonathan Edwards," unpublished address, 9 March 1958, 15 pp. (handwritten).

An excellent essay on Edwards' doctrine of freedom of will is given in the "Introduction" to the anthology Jonathan Edwards: Representative Selections, with Introduction, Bibliography and Notes, by Clarence H. Faust and Thomas H. Johnson (New York: Hill and Wong, revised edition, 1962). Faust in commenting on Edwards' idea of freedom says: "The question, as he saw it, was can a man do what he wills, not can he will as he wills. As long as he is able to do what he chooses, he is free, although he may not be able to choose his choices" p. xlix.

[1] As Niebuhr puts it so forcefully in his reflections on his own moment of conversion: "How it is possible to rely on

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This moment of conversion need not be emotional; but it is a moment of awareness, on the part of an individual or a community, that they stand in the face of a being whose power does affect them in ways over which they have no control. And at this moment human beings must decide; and how they decide shows in their ethical activity to each other and in their use of the natural world.[1]

In a lecture given in 1931 to the Yale Alumni, Niebuhr devoted most of the lecture to explaining this moment of awareness which causes individual persons and groups of persons to re-examine the basis upon which they have constructed their whole system of values. The lecture is an explanation of the theological implications of "disillusionment." The disillusionment which Niebuhr described here is the same as the awareness which he described in The Christian Century article as "doing nothing." Disillusionment with the results of human value systems forces a person to reconsider the meaning of his or her life. "The failure of the relative points us to the absolute

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God as unconquerably loving and redeeming, to have confidence in him as purposive person working towards the glorification of his creation and of himself in his works, to say to the great 'It': 'Our Father who art in heaven'—this remains the miraculous gift. It is the human impossibility which has been made possible, as has also the enlistment of these unlikely beings, these human animals, ourselves, in his cause, the cause of universal creation and universal redemption." HRN, "Reformation: Continuing Imperative," p. 249.

[1] Niebuhr's analysis of this moment of decision is similar to that of Jonathan Edwards. We commented above on how Macintosh also attaches importance to this moment of conversion and how he also drew from Edwards. See p. 87, above.

and if it makes the discovery of the absolute more difficult it also makes it much more urgent."[1] In describing this disillusionment Niebuhr did not allow an escape route which would enable someone to explain the meaningless of life and the disappointments in life by saying mankind had been betrayed by the world, or by the structure in things, or by some fate. Such an explanation is an escape because it takes away from humanity the necessity of taking responsibility for its actions, even when that action is doing nothing. "When we have faced the fact that meaninglessness is intolerable only because there is a prior meaning, and that relativity is insufficient only because there is an absolute, that our whole disappointment has been possible only because faith is more fundamental than disappointment--or when, at all events, we have come to regard our disappointment in the light of a possible eternal meaning, an ultimate, last fact, we cannot deal with failure any longer as an inconsequential thing in an inconsequential universe."[2] When we have pushed the question of "disillusionment" and of "doing nothing" to the point of considering what is the absolute in our life, we are faced with choosing that which transcends all human relativity, or with choosing something less than the absolute, which in Niebuhr's view is idolatry. For Niebuhr our awareness of the absolute which transcends anything

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[1] HRN, "Theology in a Time of Disillusionment," p. 17.

[2] Ibid., pp. 18-19.

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human places even more urgency on our doing ethically right actions; we realize that war, poverty, hunger are not God's betrayal of us but our betrayal of God. We realize the need for repentance and for reformation.

> . . . the experience of judgment taken by itself requires a more radical and a more urgent dealing with our social injustice, not a more passive one, than characterized the past. More radical because the distinction between the righteousness and the justice which is demanded and the actual evils and injustices of our world are set over against each other in antithesis rather than accommodated to each other in a scheme of development, because the kingdom of God is allowed to appear again as an absolute demand while the kingdom of this world shows its distance from the kingdom of God far more clearly than when it was regarded from the point of view of its promises rather than from that of its failures.[1]

In the essay, "The Social Gospel and the Mind of Jesus," Niebuhr elaborated an ethical view of Jesus which spelled out in greater detail Niebuhr's understanding of human responsibility; what he said here can help us understand better the ethical implications of "doing nothing." In this lecture Niebuhr set up a straw man which he then knocked down. The straw man is Niebuhr's description of the general concord among social gospellers as to what the ethical mind of Jesus is: "The mind of Jesus in the social gospel is on the whole the mind of the liberal Jesus, of Jesus the moralist, the moral idealist, the evolutionist, the indeterminist, the pacifist, the believer in permanent values."[2] Niebuhr was not only concerned to show how these views of Jesus are relative to the interests of the men who propounded them. He was also interested to develop the mind of Jesus not found in the descriptions of it in the social gospel, viz., "the mind of a God-centered, apocalyptic, revolutionary strategist."[1]

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[1] *Ibid*., p. 20.

[2] HRN, "The Social Gospel and the Mind of Jesus," p. 3. Niebuhr acknowledged that there is a divergence of "social gospels" which represents the different viewpoints of the men

Niebuhr found the social gospel's depiction of the mind of Jesus inadequate because it failed to take into account the apocalyptic imagery which is so prevalent in the message of Jesus. In Niebuhr's interpretation, the apocalyptic imagery which Jesus used is symbolic of a deeper meaning, viz., that man stands judged in the face of God.

> The mind of Jesus which is not to be found in the social gospel is the mind of a Jesus whose thoughts were directed not in the first instance to what man ought to do and in the second place to what aid he might receive from God in doing what he ought to do, but rather toward what God was doing and what man ought to do in the light of God's doing. God's doing--not what God ought to do in order that he might live up to the expectations men had of him--stands in the center of Jesus' mind. God for him is not the moral ideal but rather cosmic reality. He is the God of Job rather than the God of Plato.[2]

Because of his strong awareness of God's action in nature and in history, Jesus' attitude toward morality is one of "strategy." He is not a moralist, but a revolutionary strategist. His attitude therefore toward human value systems is

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he considered belonging to the social gospel tradition. He then proceeded to see the "accord" among them on the mind of Jesus. Niebuhr assumed this accord for the purposes of argumentation and for providing a foil to his own understanding of the mind of Jesus.

[1] HRN, "The Social Gospel and the Mind of Jesus," p. 9.

[2] *Ibid*., p. 11.

neither teleological nor deontological; his attitude is eschatological.[1] "This Jesus therefore is a revolutionary, not because he seeks to hasten evolution toward an ideal, nor because he requires men to judge themselves in the light of a transcendent ideal but because his eyes are fixed on the revolutionary events in history, that is on the discontinuities, not on continuities whether slow or speedy."[2] The revolutionary attitude of Jesus is found in his understanding of the eschaton. The end character which Jesus sees in the eschaton is not a telos, i.e., a goal toward which we strive; rather the eschaton is that which terminates human activity, i.e., that power of limitation which both judges and saves humankind.

> . . . Jesus was not a teleologist; the Kingdom of God for him was a hope, not an ideal. And the difference between a hope and an ideal is tremendous. An ideal is an end toward which we strive; a hope is a termination which is given, cannot be achieved. To act in the light of an assured hope is not to engineer a direct road toward the 'telos' but rather to prepare oneself for a gift, so that one will not miss its possibilities. The strategic approach to life, in opposition to the teleological, consists in such preparations for taking advantage of gifts which the situation gives us and in adjusting ends to means rather than means to ends. The mind of Jesus was the mind of the strategist who knows that he does not have the means at his disposal for a direct conquest of the end,

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[1] The ethical view which is behind Niebuhr's understanding of Jesus as the "strategist" is similar to the view Niebuhr described in The Responsible Self with the image of man "the responder and answerer." In The Responsible Self, Niebuhr develops this image in contrast to the images of man "the maker" and man "the citizen." Each of these images represents in Niebuhr's view a different approach to ethics: Man "the maker" represents a teleological ethics; man "the citizen" represents a deontological ethics; man "the responder" represents "cathēkontic" ethics, that is, the ethics of the fitting.

[2] HRN, "The Social Gospel and the Mind of Jesus," p. 14.

> but who discerns vast possibilities which the total situation contains and which may be received, if the means at one's disposal are correctly used for the ends which are possible.[1]

The strategy of Jesus in Niebuhr's understanding of it, is both negative and positive. Negatively, it is critical of all human value systems; it exposes the idolatry of those who absolutize what is relative. Positively, it manifests itself as repentance and forgiveness, that is, it sees purpose and meaning to suffering and death as ways of bringing atonement.

> The strategy of Jesus, the Jewish revolutionary, centers in the principles of repentance, faith, forgiveness and innocence suffering for guilt. It [is] impossible for man to take the Kingdom by violence, by self-assertion; he has no means adequate to this purpose. But it is possible for him, in repentance, to anticipate the judgment, to give up the attempt to preserve or extend the dying system and so hasten its destruction. Yet such repentance is only possible to faith which sees deliverance beyond the judgment. Without faith in that future, repentance is impossible. Forgiveness and non-resistance are essential to this strategy because without them men electing themselves as instruments of divine vengeance and judgment simply supplant one kingdom of man by another and fail to appropriate the rule of God. The suffering of innocence for guilt is the only strategy possible if there is to be any cessation of the ceaseless round of self-interests arousing self-interests, of judgments without acceptance of the Kingdom of God.[2]

The strategy of Jesus which Niebuhr described in the essay, "The Social Gospel and the Mind of Jesus," is the same strategy which Niebuhr advocated when he spoke about mankind taking responsibility for "doing nothing." As he said in the reply to his brother, "Man's task is not that of building Utopias but that of eliminating weeds and tilling the soil so that the Kingdom of

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[1] Ibid., pp. 15-16. [2] Ibid., p. 17.

God can grow. His method is not one of striving for perfection or of acting perfectly, but of clearing the road by repentance and forgiveness."[1]

B. Doctrine of History

The ethical view of man to which Niebuhr adhered is influenced very much by a theological understanding of history which he called eschatological. We have seen how Niebuhr developed the ethical implications of an eschatological understanding of history in the article on "doing nothing" and the unpublished lectures we have just examined. We now need to explain more fully Niebuhr's eschatological understanding of history as found in these writings of Niebuhr's. Though we recognize that the most complete statement of Niebuhr's understanding of history is to be found in The Meaning of Revelation, we have limited ourselves to these writings in attempting to show that in 1932 Niebuhr had come to his mature understanding of God which underlies all the rest of his thought from that time on.

In Niebuhr's understanding of eschatology, the *eschaton* is not seen as some future which is totally unrelated to what happens now and which is totally "other-wordly." The future is not some mythic moment of "never, never time." For him the future is the possibility of the present moment.

> . . . we understand once more what Jesus meant when he said 'This generation shall not pass away until all things be accomplished.' This generation, this life is for us the decisive and the only decisive moment: we can neither pre-

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[1] HRN, "A Communication . . . ," p. 447.

> sume that we or that others shall be glad in the gladness of those who come after us nor that our labors will be completed by others. The theology of disillusionment becomes a theology of the present moment, individually and socially. As a theology of the present moment, it has its own particular historical task to perform both as theory and as pointing to practice. In its theory its urgent and inescapable task lies in its attempt to realize the eternal significance of the present stage, to point out the places where the eternal breaks into our time. In the practice to which it points its duty lies in discovering and defining the sort of life, individual and social, in which the present may realize its relation to the eternal--in some form of faith and religious experience and in some form of justice. Recognizing the relativity of every formulation of the ideal of the Kingdom of God, it will nevertheless know that the absolute can be heard within the relative and that the eternal must become concrete in each present moment.[1]

In analyzing the eschatological implications of history as the possibility of the "now," Niebuhr had no illusions about the meaning of history. His eschatological understanding of history is realistic; it is also empirical in that it attempts to state things the way they are, and not as we would have them be, nor as they will be if only we do such and such, nor as they may be in some "world" outside our experience. An integral part of Niebuhr's critical assessment of history, which attempts to be empirical, is a strong sense for the tragic.

The sense for the tragic is found in Niebuhr's frank recognition of the reality of evil. He gave full cognizance to the facts of evil. H. Richard's acknowledgment of the tragic in history is similar to that of his brother Reinhold. Both brothers defined the tragic in counter-distinction to the moral optimism of nineteenth-century liberal theology; both considered this optimism as fallacious and shallow.

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[1] HRN, "Theology in a Time of Disillusionment," pp. 20-21.

There is however a difference between the brothers over the meaning of the tragic. The divergence between their views of the tragic results from their differing view on the eschatological meaning of history.[1] Reinhold saw that H. Richard's eschatological view made God into a miracle-worker who interferes with history.[2] Reinhold made this criticism because his view of the tragic precluded any realization of the moral ideal now; his view of man's sinfulness seems to be more pessimistic than that of H. Richard's.[3] H. Richard objected to Reinhold's charge that H. Richard's eschatological view of history made God into a miracle-worker who occasionally intervenes in history.

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[1] Reinhold stated his disagreement with H. Richard's view of eschatology in this way: "What makes my brother's particular kind of eschatology impossible for me is that he identifies everything that is occurring in history (the drift toward disaster, another world war and possibly a world revolution) with the counsels of God, and then suddenly, by a leap of faith, comes to the conclusion that the same God, who uses brutalities and forces, against which man must maintain conscientious scruples, will finally establish an ideal society in which pure love will reign." Reinhold Niebuhr, "Must We Do Nothing?" p. 416.

[2] Reinhold's criticism which contains his view that H. Richard's God is a miracle-worker is: "It is plausible also to interpret both the evolutionary and the catastrophic elements in history in religious terms and to see the counsels of God in them. But it is hardly plausible to expect divine intervention to introduce something into history which is irrelevant to anything we find in history now." Ibid., p. 416.

[3] Below we will describe in detail the difference between the brothers in their interpretations of the tragic. Our interest in this section is to indicate how H. Richard's doctrine of history is that which brings the divergence of views between the two brothers.

> The fundamental question seems to me to be whether 'the history of mankind is a perennial tragedy' which can derive meaning only from a goal which lies beyond history, as my brother maintains, or whether the 'eschatological' faith, to which I seek to adhere, is justifiable. In that faith tragedy is only the prelude to fulfillment, and a prelude which is necessary because of human nature; the kingdom of God comes inevitably, though whether we shall see it or not, depends on our recognition of its presence and our acceptance of the only kind of life which will enable us to enter it, the life of repentance and forgiveness.[1]

H. Richard found that Reinhold, in fact, had so separated God from history that it was Reinhold who had placed God outside human history and thus Reinhold could only view H. Richard's eschatological view of history as God interfering now and again in history. "For my brother God is outside the historical processes, so much so that he charges me with faith in a miracle-working deity which interferes occasionally, sometimes brutally, sometimes redemptively, in this history."[2]

H. Richard Niebuhr, it seems, had an eschatological view of history which was less pessimistic than the view of his brother. In H. Richard's view, man's spirit of repentance and forgiveness has positive overtones as well as negative ones. Because God is in time and because God values all beings, we humans can take confidence in the goodness of nature and in the outcome of history. "The manifestation of the rule of God in the events of . . . time calls not for repentance only but also for rejoicing. There is a bad time coming; there is also a good time coming. The two events cannot be separated from each other. The slayer may be trusted because he is the bringer of life. The life-giving Father, however, cannot be separated from the destroying judge. It is one and the same process which damns and saves. . . ."[1] We humans can take confidence in the process of nature and history, not in the unreflective way of nineteenth-century moral optimism, but with the awareness that God is in time and does rule it. On this view, eschatology gives purpose and meaning to life. "It is here that the rule of God comes to be of decisive importance and the meaning of eschatology lies largely in this, that it represents history not as an indeterminate sequence of events where men may adjust themselves to a relatively stable environment and to each other, but as a driving, directional movement ruthless so far as individuals and nations are concerned, almost impersonal in its determinism."[2]

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[1] HRN, "A Communication . . . ," p. 447.

[2] *Ibid*. Examples of how Reinhold Niebuhr placed God "outside" history are: ". . . the history of mankind is a perennial tragedy; for the highest ideals which the individual may project are ideals which he can never realize in social and collective terms. . . . The goal which a sensitive individual sets for society must therefore always be something which is a little outside and beyond history." ". . . it is inevitable that religious imagination should set goals beyond history. 'Man's reach is beyond his grasp, or what's a heaven for.'" Reinhold Niebuhr, "Why Must We Do Nothing?" p. 417.

C. Doctrine of God

It becomes apparent that that which gives a distinctive character to H. Richard Niebuhr's doctrine of man and doctrine of history is his doctrine of God. For example, his doctrine of God is at the basis of Reinhold Niebuhr's objection to H. Richard's view of history as eschatological and of "doing nothing" as the greatest moral question; the ways in which the two brothers viewed God distinguished them from each other. We have also seen how H. Richard's doctrine of God distinguished him from K. Barth, from D. C. Macintosh, and from H. N. Wieman.

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[1] HRN, "The Social Gospel and the Mind of Jesus," p. 13.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 12.

Limiting ourselves to the public exchange of views between the Niebuhr brothers, we see that the divergence between the two brothers on the question of God is one of degree and not of kind. Both of them work out from an orthodox Christian view of God for which they found support in the neo-orthodoxy of K. Barth and E. Brunner. Yet both brothers are not to be considered "neo-orthodox" in a Barthian way, for both were very concerned to speak about the human experience of the divine and the ethical implications of this experience; Barth on their views of him did not do this, and for that reason they found him lacking. It appears that the reason for the Niebuhr brothers' interest in the human side of the experience of God grew more out of their situation in American religious realism and their situation in American liberal theology than out of the influences of European liberal theology. Yet we can say that these men taught an orthodox view of God similar to Barth, viz., what God is in himself we cannot know or say anything about and what we do know of the divine is what the deity chooses to reveal.

The degree of difference between the two brothers comes over how we come to know God through an examination of human experience. For Reinhold, it seems, God is "outside" our experience; he was satisfied to say that we know nothing of God and concerns himself with a theological understanding of human moral activity. H. Richard, on the other hand, while holding to the orthodox view that we cannot know or say anything about God in himself, did accept the view that the human experience of God in nature and history is a way of knowing God by way of what value God has for man. However, his orthodox view of God did not allow him to judge the value of deity by any preconceived view of God; for this reason, he remained adamant on his stand not to speak metaphysically of God. For him, God was beyond any human value while, at the same time, being the basis and ground of all human evaluation. Yet by studying what happens in human moral adjustment to that which values mankind and nature we do come to know what has the value of deity. H. Richard therefore was not only concerned with a theological understanding of human moral activity, as his brother is; he was also concerned with determining what is at the basis of the value of deity, i.e., what makes the subject matter of the human understanding of ethics and the subject matter of the human understanding of nature "theological" and not just a value-theory approach to ethics and not just a natural science approach to nature. It appears that H. Richard was much more "empirical" in his understanding of God than is Reinhold; for H. Richard, God is in time and in nature, and we can know him by man's moral adjustment to this power who gives value to all being.[1]

Unlike Reinhold's understanding of God, for H. Richard God is in time. In fact, in H. Richard's understanding, God is so much involved in time that he is the structure of things and the purpose of history. If God were not in time, there would be no basis to H. Richard's ethical understanding of "doing nothing." "But if there is no God, or if God is up in heaven and not in time itself, it is a very foolish inactivity [i.e., doing nothing]."[2] For Niebuhr, however, God is in time.

H. Richard spelled out in detail in his reply to Reinhold the meaning of God in time.

> But God, I believe, is always in history; he is the structure in things, the source of all meaning, the 'I am that I am,' that which is that it is. He is the rock against which we beat in vain, that which bruises and overwhelms us when we seek to impose our wishes, contrary to his, upon him. That structure of the universe, that creative will, can no more be said to interfere brutally in history than the violated laws of my organism can be said to interfere brutally with my life if they make me pay the cost of my violation. That structure of the universe, that will of God, does bring war and depression upon us when we bring it upon ourselves, for we live in the kind of world which visits our iniquities upon us and our children, no matter how much we pray and desire that it be otherwise.[3]

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[1] It seems to us that if Niebuhr were to have developed an explicit metaphysics he could very well have gone along some of the lines that H. N. Wieman has gone. Niebuhr's orthodox understanding and his neo-Kantian critical attitude, however, sounded a "red alert" for him when he confronted Wieman's monistic thought which results in a naturalism. Whether he saw no possibility of any future metaphysical understanding of God which could pass the muster of his criticism is a moot point; he did know that during his lifetime this was not the time for a metaphysical understanding of God.

[2] HRN, "The Grace of Doing Nothing," p. 380.

[3] HRN, "A Communication . . . , p. 447.

Niebuhr equated the processes of nature and the effects of human freedom as seen in history with the acts of God. In no way, however, are they to be equated with God in himself; for Niebuhr the emphasis is on the priority of God who acts in time. What we know as God are his actions which we recognize by their value of deity. The value of deity is however found in realizing that God is prior to all value-judgments which we make and in realizing that he values us and creation; through this realization we come to know God as the basis on which we can do actions which have value. We experience the judgment as well as the saving grace of God, the basis of all value but not a value in himself, by observing the results of human endeavor. "But this same structure in things which is our enemy is our redeemer; 'it means intensely and means good'--not the good which we desire, but the good which we would desire if we were good and really wise."[1]

In describing the theological implications of disillusionment in 1931, Niebuhr said, "Now more than ever the problem of theology is the problem of God and the problem of God is the problem of our ultimate fate, of the constitution of the universe."[1] On our understanding of Niebuhr's doctrine of God, this statement is not confined to the historical situation of 1931; the "now" quality of the problem of God is in Niebuhr's view a constant part of the human experience of God. God is a problem for humans because God condemns all human idolatry, i.e., the human propensity to mistake what has the value of deity with a human value which is relative; if man persists in idolatry, the inevitable result is an experience, individually and socially, of judgment. On the other hand, once we have confronted God as void and judgment, we can then come to realize the saving effects of repentance and forgiveness; we come to have confidence in the power of love and power of life because we have come to know God the companion.

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[1] Ibid. Niebuhr used the same kind of language to express his view of Jesus' understanding of God. "To recapture the faith of Jesus is to recapture faith in the God of the creative process, the dynamic urge in the moving universe, which brings death and destruction to those who will not yield to its universal, faithful working, which heals and forgives and makes ever new beginnings possible." "The God of Jesus here is neither the kind Father whose concern is the welfare of his people nor the transcendent ideal or source. He is the dynamic driving force immanent in the events of time; he is the judge, the destroyer." HRN, "The Social Gospel and the Mind of Jesus," pp. 22 and 14, respectively.

Niebuhr considered his doctrine of God to be biblical. One reason for Niebuhr saying that his doctrine is biblical is because his view of God pays heed to the eschatological mentality of Jesus; and, as we have seen, an eschatological understanding plays an important role in Niebuhr's view of God. Further evidence for seeing Niebuhr's judgment on his view of God as biblical is seen in his description of the mind of Jesus. In this description Niebuhr used the same language which he used to express his view of God in the reply to Reinhold Niebuhr, viz., language which saw God as the structure in things and as the creative will which motivates the human valuing process.

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[1] HRN, "Theology in a Time of Disillusionment," p. 17.

> This God of history, to whom the mind of Jesus is directed is not the head of a family endeavoring to cement its members together by infinite kindness. He is a destructive as well as a constructive God. He is a rock which falls with crushing weight; he is the God, let us remember, who previously had directed Babylonians and Assyrians to destroy Jerusalem and Samaria. Evidently now he is directing the Romans to repeat the judgment. At all events he will destroy Jerusalem which does not know the things which belong to its peace. That his rule is becoming manifest calls first of all not for rejoicing and celebration but for fear and repentance. The God of the liberal Jesus is the God of eighteenth century deism, the God who exists for the sake of human life and morality; the God of Jesus the Jew is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob--the reality which is that which it is, he is the God of Amos, Isaiah and Micah, terrible in his judgments. He is not the synthetic unity of Goodness, Truth and Beauty nor a First Cause, but a faithful, that is unswerving, reality with laws that can only be broken at the price of life.[1]

Niebuhr's understanding of Jesus' mind can be said to be "biblical," for Niebuhr accepted in 1933 what has now become the standard approach among scripture scholars for understanding Jesus' apocalyptic mentality. Beyond a historical understanding of "biblical," Niebuhr's understanding of God adheres to the larger notion of "biblical," viz., an ecclesial normative tradition. What is important about Niebuhr's "orthodox" interpretation of God is that Niebuhr has interjected into it a critical and empirical analysis of the meaning of value; this kind of analysis gives to Niebuhr's doctrine of God a power of persuasion which most other orthodox views of God do not have. His view of God does not take away from mankind responsibility for its actions.

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[1] HRN, "The Social Gospel and the Mind of Jesus," pp. 12-13.

D. Critical, Realistic Stance

We have examined in detail what H. Richard Niebuhr meant by critical realism and how this understanding played an important role in his doctrine of God. An element of his realistic stance to which we have alluded is Niebuhr's sense for the tragic in history. We need now to elaborate further the meaning of the tragic in Niebuhr and how it also plays a role in his doctrine of God.

On way of understanding H. Richard's understanding of the tragic is to contrast it with Reinhold Niebuhr's understanding of the tragic. In developing this contrast we will limit ourselves to the exchange of views between the brothers.

As we have seen above, part of the difference between the brothers on the meaning of the tragic resulted from their differing understandings of the meaning of history. For Reinhold, history was a "perennial tragedy." As he put it, "The highest ideals which the individual may project are ideals which he can never realize in social and collective terms."[1] The contrast which Reinhold sets up is between an individual's ideal and the society's fulfillment of that ideal; the society in his view is "sub-human" whereas the ideal which the individual projects is "outside" the human.

> Individuals set the goal for society but society itself must achieve the goal and society is and will always remain sub-human. The goal which a sensitive individual

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[1] Reinhold Niebuhr, "Must We Do Nothing?" p. 417.

> sets for society must therefore always be something which is a little outside and beyond history.[1]

On this view, the absolute ideal, viz., God, is outside history; as such, man's ethical actions can never achieve the ideal but, rather, will always result in tragic events.

> There can be nothing absolute in history, no matter how frequently God may intervene in it. Man cannot live without a sense of the absolute, but neither can he achieve the absolute. He may resolve the tragic character of that fact by religious faith, by the experience of grace in which the unattainable is experienced in anticipatory terms, but he can never resolve in purely ethical terms the conflict between what is and what ought to be.[2]

By placing God "a little outside and beyond history" Reinhold was not reverting to a supernaturalistic view of God which says God can intervene in history and nature as a miracle-worker; he repudiated this view when he voiced his disapproval of H. Richard's view of God as allowing such magical intervention. What he did mean by this God who is an ideal "a little outside and beyond history" is not clear to us.[3]

H. Richard's difficulty with Reinhold's view of the tragic came from his disagreement with Reinhold's equating God with some ideal outside history.[4] To conceive of God in such a way in H. Richard's view is to judge the value of deity by some human value known prior to the experience of God. For H. Richard, if God is a human ideal, then indeed there can only be a tragic ending to human ethical endeavor.[1] But God is not an ethical ideal for H. Richard; rather, he is the directional force in nature and history which is experienced both as a judgment and as a salvation.

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[1] _Ibid_.

[2] _Ibid_.

[3] It seems that if God is "outside history" and if man has no possibility of reaching ethical fulfilment there is then no Christian sense of tragedy, but rather only a pagan one in which there is inevitable down fall for human endeavor. It also seems that his view of God would lead to total agnosticism if thought out to its logical conclusion.

[4] In the essay, "The Social Gospel and the Mind of Jesus," H. Richard did an analysis of Reinhold's ethical position. He called Reinhold's interpretation of the mind of Jesus, the view of "Jesus the Perfectionist." H. Richard acknowledged the difference between Reinhold's view of Jesus and the views of other

> The society of love is an impossible human ideal, as the fellowship of the organism is an impossible ideal for the cell. It is not an ideal toward which we can strive, but an 'emergent,' a potentiality in our situation which remains unrealized so long as we try to impose our pattern, our wishes upon the divine creative process.[2]

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social gospellers, which H. Richard called "utilitarian"; and yet H. Richard did find a communality between Reinhold and other social gospellers which defines God as a moral ideal. "Because he is not a utilitarian but a perfectionist this Jesus teaches an absolute morality; he has a transcendent perspective on life. He teaches a pure religious idealism; he demands love, self-negation, non-resistance, not because they lead to the happiness of society but because they are required by the eternal ideal. The differences between this view of Jesus and that of Page and Ward are evident. The point in common interests us here. The God of Jesus the Perfectionist, like the God of Jesus the utilitarian is a moral ideal and this moral ideal is conceived in terms of values. . . . Reinhold Niebuhr's perfectionist Jesus remains a pacifist out of obedience to the ideal, but since Niebuhr himself sees that perfectionism is no answer to the problem of human welfare and happiness, this perfectionism and pacifism are dismissed, save as qualifications of the social struggle and as the trans-historical reference which gives ultimate meaning to a divided life" (pp. 7-8).

[1] H. Richard would agree with Reinhold on the ultimate tragic view of history, _if_ God were outside the processes of nature and history. "If, however, history is no more than tragedy, if there is no fulfilment in it, then my brother is right. Then we must rest content with the clash of self-interested individuals, personal or social. But in that case I see no reason why we should qualify the clash of competition with a homeopathic dose of Christian 'love.'" HRN, "A Communication . . . ," p. 447.

[2] _Ibid_.

H. Richard did recognize the facts of evil in the human ethical endeavor; in his view there is a tragic element to life. But he interpreted this tragic element in view of a redemptive meaning which gives purpose to the suffering involved in tragedy.

> History is not a perennial tragedy but a road to fulfillment and that fulfillment requires the tragic outcome of every self-assertion, for it is a fulfillment which can only be designated as "love." It has created fellowship in atoms and organisms, at bitter cost to electrons and cells; and it is creating something better than human selfhood but at bitter cost to that selfhood. This is not a faith in progress, for evil grows as well as good and every self-assertion must be eliminated somewhere and somehow--by innocence suffering for guilt, it seems.[1]

For Niebuhr, the grace of doing nothing is taking responsibility for the tragedies of nature and history; and we humans can only do this with faith in God who is the structure of things and the purpose in history. For Niebuhr, God is part and parcel of the creational process both in nature and in human endeavor; but God is not equated with creation, natural or human. Yet because God is in time there is never any ultimate or perennial tragedy.

E. Summary

In our analysis of "doing nothing" we singled out four areas into which this concept penetrates in Niebuhr's thought. By splitting Niebuhr's generalization into these four areas we sought some clarification as to the fuller meaning of

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[1] *Ibid.*

Niebuhr's doctrine of God. However, to leave the impression that Niebuhr's thought is better understood by sectioning it into manageable parts is to do an injustice to the integrity of Niebuhr's thought.

Niebuhr's thought is integral. The integrity of Niebuhr's thought is due to his doctrine of God. Because his doctrine of God is all-inclusive, this doctrine touches all of life. So in addition to being integral, Niebuhr's thought on God is also complex.

The complexity of Niebuhr's thought is due in part to his insistence that theology is to be empirical. From an empirical point of view nothing escapes analysis. Anything experienced, whether it be natural processes, or human ideals, or historical events, can be analyzed not merely as a projection of the human mind but as a part of reality; anything can become an object. Niebuhr's attempt to study the object who is God has led him to the conviction that this being who is the power of life is beyond any human understanding; nothing can be said of God in himself except that which God chooses to reveal.

The fact that underlies Niebuhr's empirical analysis is that God is experienced. He is experienced negatively as that absolute power who is not a mere being, a little larger than the rest (prima inter pars) nor a preconceived value to be sought by humans. God is experienced positively as the all-powerful base of being who gives value to being by his evaluation of it. This experience of God which is God revealing himself is found both in nature and in history. This experience however is the human counterpart to this process of revelation; it is not God in himself. We come to know God by a study of the human moral adjustment to this power which gives value to all being. On the one hand, we come to know what is evil by our experience of the judgment of God on our activity which shows itself both in natural processes and in human history. On the other hand, we come to know good by our experience of the mercy of God which shows itself in the natural and human endeavors to further the process of life.

Niebuhr's concept of revelation is twofold. First, it has basis in nature; it is a natural theology. ". . . there is at least a remote analogy to the unique fact of revelation in the 'givenness' of all beings having intrinsic value and that the necessity of revelation is due to the fundamental character of the need and value with which religion is concerned." For Niebuhr himself, his historical experience of God is also intimately bound up with Christianity; but he did not discount other historical manifestations of God, e.g., in Buddhism or in Mohammedanism. Niebuhr did however say that any content which a particular historical revelation contains does not go contrary to that which we find in nature—it only furthers the human awareness of the value of God already known there. "Furthermore, it will appear, I believe, that the content of revelation is not the self-disclosure of an unknown being, but the unveiling of the value of a known being. What is revealed in revelation is not a being as such, but rather its deity-value, not that it is, but that it 'loves us,' 'judges us,' that it makes life worth living."[1]

Niebuhr's later elaborations on the value of deity in The Meaning of Revelation and in Radical Monotheism and Western Culture are only a reiteration of what he stated so succinctly in the reply to his brother's criticism of "doing nothing." From our understanding, Niebuhr came to his all-inclusive notion of God which gives both integrity and complexity to his thought from his understanding of theology as experiential and realistic. He learned the meaning of experiential in part from his contact with the empirical emphasis found in American religious thought.

II. How "Empirical" is H. Richard Niebuhr's Doctrine of God?

In the preceding sections we have used the word "empirical" both to describe what H. Richard Niebuhr meant by "critical realism" and to describe the theological formulation he gave to his doctrine of God in the generalization called "doing nothing." We think that we have demonstrated that, in some way, the intellectual journey of Niebuhr in the period from 1920-30 can be called Niebuhr's "quest for the empirical." We also think that we have demonstrated that the mature concept of the "empirical" to which Niebuhr came in the 1930's is that which gives distinctiveness and power to his doctrine of God. We have also seen that both Niebuhr's interest in the "empirical" and Niebuhr's understanding of the "empirical" were greatly influenced by men who were American.

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[1] HRN, "Value-Theory and Theology," p. 116.

We now need to examine more closely whether or not Niebuhr's understanding of the "empirical" is adequate. In other words, we need to examine whether the early Niebuhr's fascination with empirical theology and whether the mature Niebuhr's theological formulation of the doctrine of God can be adequately, or even correctly, be called "empirical"--despite the fact that Niebuhr himself thought that in his theological formulation of the doctrine of God he was doing a type of empirical theology.

To determine the adequacy of calling Niebuhr's theology "empirical" we need some kind of contrast and comparison wherein other thinkers who think of themselves as empirical theologians both distinguish their thought on religious experience from Niebuhr's thought and find grounds of similarity between their thought and Niebuhr's thought. The three empirical theologians who have given Niebuhr's thought the benefit of their critical analyses are Henry Nelson Wieman, Bernard Eugene Meland, and Bernard Loomer.[1] Wieman and Meland consider Niebuhr's thought in their co-authored book on religious philosophy in America, which appeared in 1936 during the time-span which we have chosen to examine the development and mature expression of Niebuhr's doctrine of God. Loomer's treatment appeared in 1948.[1]

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[1] See H. N. Wieman and B. E. Meland, Chapter V "Neo-Supernaturalists," American Philosophies of Religion (Chicago: Willett, Clark & Co., 1936), pp. 77-95, and Bernard M. Loomer, "Neo-Naturalism and Neo-Orthodoxy," The Journal of Religion 28 (1948): 79-91. D. C. Macintosh did respond to the criticism of his thought made by Niebuhr in "Value-Theory and Theology." Macintosh's posture, however, in his response is defensive while at the same time missing the point of Niebuhr's criticism. For these reasons it is not helpful in determining whether or not Niebuhr's thought is a kind of "empirical" theology. See D. C. Macintosh, "Theology, Valuational or Existential?" Review of Religion 4 (1939): 23-44.

A. Criticism of Niebuhr's Thought by Empirical Theologians

1. Critique of Niebuhr by Wieman and Meland

Simply stated, in the view of Wieman and Meland, H. Richard is a "neo-supernaturalist."[2] Since they place the

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[1] Though Wieman and Meland treated Niebuhr's thought in 1936, they did not read several of the published articles of Niebuhr which we have considered as integral to an adequate understanding of Niebuhr's thought; the works by Niebuhr which they cite in the bibliography of their book are "Religious Realism in the Twentieth Century" and H. R. Niebuhr (with Pauck and Miller), The Church Against the World (Chicago: Willett, Clark & Co., 1935). Insofar as they have not seen Niebuhr's thought in the larger perspective which we have laid out for it, we consider their treatment of Niebuhr inadequate; our disagreement with their analysis will become apparent below. In 1937, the year after the publication of Wieman's and Meland's book, Niebuhr offered his criticism of Wieman in "Value-Theory and Theology"; Wieman has not responded in print to this critique. Loomer cites The Meaning of Revelation as the locus towards which he is directing his analysis; insofar as this book of Niebuhr's is a further elaboration of his mature expression of his thought found in the reply to Reinhold Niebuhr, Loomer has the advantage over Wieman and Meland of seeing H. Richard Niebuhr's thought in the larger perspective which we have elaborated. This advantage may account for Loomer's finding some sympathetic resonances of the "neo-orthodoxy" of Niebuhr with empirical theism, e.g., "I assume that so-called 'neo-orthodox' thought, in its reinterpretation of Christian faith, has some possible insights of a serious nature to offer for the consideration of those engaged in the task of presenting the Christian faith to modern man. . . . Even though I do not thoroughly examine the truth value of these insights, the object of this paper is to show that their content can be seen to be compatible with a neo-naturalistic framework of thought." Loomer, "Neo-naturalism and Neo-orthodoxy," p. 79.

[2] "Neo-supernaturalist" is a sub-category made by Wieman and Meland in the major category "supernaturalism." Wieman and Meland divide their treatment of American religious philosophy

the several expressions of empirical theology, which they find within the American religious philosophical tradition, in the "naturalist" tradition of thought, they in no way find Niebuhr's method or theological expression of this thought to be empirical. In fact, they find the neo-supernaturalism of Niebuhr to be at the opposite extreme of some kinds of empirical theology.[1]

If we rest firm with the categorization of H. Richard Niebuhr offered by Wieman and Meland, we must then conclude that Niebuhr's quest for the empirical in the 1920's ends with a rejection of the empirical in the 1930's. However, it does not seem to us that Wieman's and Meland's categorization of Niebuhr is adequate. We say this for two reasons: (1) They do not consider the period of growth in Niebuhr from 1920-30, nor do they consider some of the basic published formulations of Niebuhr's mature thought. (2) Their explicit treatment of Niebuhr's "neo-supernaturalism" is by innuendo, viz., they refer to his name in a treatment which devotes considerable space to an analysis of the European influences of Barth and Tillich on neo-supernaturalism in America; we have shown that, at least

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into four categories: (1) the tradition of supernaturalism; (2) the tradition of idealism; (3) the tradition of Romanticism; and (4) the tradition of naturalism. Chapter III of their book, "Traditions Shaping American Religious Thought," American Philosophies of Religion, explains on what bases they determine these four traditions.

[1] "The most striking manifestation of religious thought and life in the Western world today is the appearance of two extremes. An extreme form of supernaturalism and an extreme form of naturalism stand over against each other. The one is called neo-supernaturalism and the other non-theistic religious humanism." Wieman and Meland, p. 77.

for H. Richard Niebuhr, his mature thought must also be seen in relation to American religious thought.[1]

Despite these deficiencies which we find in Wieman's and Meland's treatment of Niebuhr, it is important for us to examine what they say in this book, However, our interest in Wieman's and Meland's views on American religious philosophy is not limited to what they have to say about "neo-supernaturalism"; it also extends to what they have to say about "naturalism." The contrasts with which Wieman and Meland treat these two traditions offer us a kind of ruler with which we can measure some of the conclusions which we have made above on Niebuhr's thought; as we shall see, Niebuhr does not fit tightly into either category.

Wieman and Meland do recognize that the individual thinkers whom they place into one of the four categories used by them to distinguish the various thinkers treated in their book may very well use elements from another category. Their interest, however, in setting up these four categories is to find out what is the basic bias within which a theological perspective is presented.

> . . . in every case there is manifest a decisive preference for one or the other temper of thought. To discover these basic leanings in the philosophies of religion of today contributes measurably to the clarity of perspective, not only

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[1] The two places where Wieman and Meland refer to H. Richard Niebuhr do not even include his first name, that is, he is referred to as "one of the Niebuhr brothers." See Wieman and Meland, pp. 37 and 92.

> because of what is revealed as background, but for what is disclosed regarding the motivation of thought and the pitch of perspective.[1]

What we have been suggesting in our dissertation is that an integral part of the "pitch" of Niebuhr's thought is an understanding of the "empirical." In a way we are carrying out in detail with regard to H. Richard Niebuhr's thought that which Wieman and Meland attempt to do on a larger scale in their book.[2]

At the base of Wieman's and Meland's understanding of the American religious tradition is their concern to provide for contemporary man a religion which is adequate to the rapid and swift changes that have taken place in the processes of life.[3]

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[1] _Ibid_., p. 56.

[2] "To discover these determining or shaping elements in a philosophy, one needs to do more than consult the contemporary statement of the position; one must view the current expression in relation to the historic streams of thought that have fed into it, for it is in the broader perspective that the motivating factors come to light. Method, to be sure, is detectable within the short range of thought revealed by the contemporary view; but to sense the more subtle, motivating influences that determine the _slant of vision_, and which give rise to the inhibitory as well as the outreaching impulses, one must see the reactive tendencies that lay back of that way of thinking." Wieman and Meland, p. 12.

[3] Wieman lists several areas of rapid change which have caused problems for religion in today's world. We quote them here without his expanded commentary: "The _first_ of these peculiar problems is a great increase in economic goods, but produced under the control of social customs which make it impossible for the great majority of people to have abundant access to them" (p. 24). "The _second_ great cultural problem which distinguishes our time might be stated thus: Great increase in power of achievement but no cause sufficiently dominant to draw all this power into its service" (p. 25). "The _third_ peculiar cultural problem of our time is an increase in the materials and opportunities for happiness without standards

They realize that in more stable times there is no need to examine so minutely the philosophical presuppositions upon which the religion is based; in stable times philosophy of religion becomes theology, that is, in Wieman's and Meland's view, a systematic presentation of the religious insight of the culture and an attempt to clarify this basic religious insight of the society within which it exists. As such, it motivates the faithful to action within the limits set by the society. In these times of individual and social integration, theology becomes a way of stabilizing the society and becomes a system of thought by which an established way of life is justified; it tends to preserve the status quo. But in times of rapid change and in times of dissatisfaction with the traditional religion, two other functions of philosophy of religion come to the fore; these functions are much more distinctively philosophical rather than theological.

> The first of these further functions is to theorize in an exploratory and experimental manner in the endeavor to bring to light the outlines of that new and different way of religious living which may meet the requirements of this cultural transformation which is going on. The second of these two further functions is to criticize the old way and point out what seems to be better. Thus, philosophy of religion has three functions in respect to the actual conduct of religious living: to sustain, to explore and to transform.[1]

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adequate to guide us in our choices and appreciations" (p. 26). A fourth distinctive cultural problem of our time is a great increase of interdependence but without integrating loyalties, habits and sentiments which would enable us to live together co-operatively and in creative community" (p. 27). "A fifth problem of our time is the drift toward collectivism with the danger of diminishing seriously our personal freedom" (p. 28).

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 61.

Traditional supernaturalism, in the view of Wieman and Meland, is devoted to the first function of philosophy of religion, viz., it is devoted to maintaining an established system and by that fact is resistant to change. The basic temper of this thought is authoritarian,

> That is to say, belief ultimately rests upon the force of organized authority and precedent, rather than upon the appeal of logical reason. Back of every creed or dogma stands the imposing witness of the apostolic succession. Reverence for its tradition, or the compelling influence of organized forces that _do_ revere it, constitutes the ground of appeal. But there is a logic to this authoritarianism after all. For back of the apostolic succession is the historic revelation that is thought to have first communicated the faith to the saints. Truth thus _once and for all time delivered_, is not _attained_; it is only _retained_. It is not _discovered_; but _recovered_ and communicated. Always it is an absolute, a priori body of knowledge, independent of human frailty and beyond human comprehension.[1]

Basically traditional supernaturalism is characterized by rigidity, that is, it resists change. And by an appeal to truth _outside_ the resources of human experience and knowledge, which characterizes a traditional Christian view of revelation, traditional supernaturalism tends to magnify the importance of a propositional notion of faith. If one accepts the basic creedal statement, then he is on the way to salvation. But since these beliefs are founded on a truth outside empirical and rational investigation they tend to be authoritarian, and they tend to encourage an "other-wordly" view of life.[1] With this appeal to other-worldliness, traditional supernaturalism tends to hold a pessimistic view of this world which all humans know and experience, though it does not teach that this world is evil. "Where they [supernaturalists] differ from others is not that they necessarily think so badly of this world; but they think so highly of that other, that, by contrast, their appraisal of this world seems pessimistic and generally depreciative."[2] The basic characteristic which Wieman and Meland think summarizes the attitudes of traditional supernaturalism which we have been describing is "cultural intransigence." By this they mean the attitude which can remain aloof from any of "this-worldly" values and which criticizes these values in terms of an other-worldly value.

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[1] _Ibid_., p. 35. It should be pointed out that Wieman and Meland are presenting a "static" view of dogma; in doing so, they present a one-sided view. There are many men within Roman Catholicism, the group which Wieman and Meland find most representative of the supernaturalistic tradition, who hold to a more dynamic view of dogma. A book which gives a larger perspective than Wieman and Meland on the development of Dogma is Jan Walgrave's _Unfolding Dogma: The Nature of Doctrinal Development_ (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972). We mention this larger perspective here because we do not agree entirely with Wieman's and Meland's analysis of supernaturalism. Our reason for summarizing their views is not to affirm what they say but rather to get at what we consider Niebuhr's view of empirical theology.

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[1] Wieman and Meland do not completely disallow an acceptance of certain beliefs which take on a propositional or creedal formulation. What they find offensive in traditional supernaturalism is its use of "revelation" to discredit an empirical and rational investigation of these beliefs. "Of course one cannot intelligently adopt any way of life without accepting the beliefs required for that way of living. In this sense every philosophy of religion, and every philosophy of every other human activity, must set forth certain beliefs as required for that kind of procedure. But the uniqueness of traditional supernaturalism is that it presents these beliefs for acceptance, not on grounds of rational or empirical evidence, but because they are revealed and because they are necessary to salvation." Wieman and Meland, p. 68.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 69.

> Culture belongs to nature. But this religion is the representative on earth of the supernatural. Even the highest fulfillment of the natural is evil as compared to the supernatural, unless it offers itself to be abolished and abandoned as soon as it has lifted one toward the supernatural as far as it can. The natural is good only when it delivers itself up to the supernatural and perishes in so doing.[1]

And yet, even while standing in irreconcilable opposition to a prevailing culture, the greatest living proponent of "traditional supernaturalism," Roman Catholicism, became so much a part of Western European culture that no one can adequately understand the "western" mentality and way of life without some historical understanding of Roman Catholicism. Wieman and Meland do recognize this fact, for, it seems, one of their basic premises is that all religion is cultural.[2] They find supernaturalism so dangerous when it forgets this, viz., when it loses its critical or prophetic capacity and ends up sustaining a status quo in the name of something beyond human experience and reason when, in fact, the status quo is the product of human effort.

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[1] Ibid., p. 70.

[2] It should be noted that Roman Catholicism has never shied from the culture within which it existed; and it has changed with each culture as that culture changed. Any serious study of the history of liturgy in Roman Catholicism will demonstrate this fact. Wieman and Meland were correct in 1936 in speaking about the inertial energies at rest in the Roman Church which made it appear as an opponent of "this world." In the light of Vatican II, however, we see that those energies, once at rest, are stirring. Where this power will end is precisely part of the concern of Wieman and Meland as well as of many Roman Catholic religious thinkers.

Wieman and Meland sense the fact that traditional supernaturalism accepts a kind of acculturation process; they object however to its appeal to a truth outside experience as the ultimate truth. When Wieman and Meland come to "neo-supernaturalism," they begin by distinguishing theologians of this tradition as "neo" supernaturalists, and not as "traditional" supernaturalists, because these neo-supernaturalists claim to have truly separated the supernatural from all cultural entanglement. "The chief point of difference is that neo-supernaturalism extricates the supernatural from all entangling alliances with this natural world. Traditional supernaturalism did not."[1] From Wieman's and Meland's view, which says that all religion is cultural, neo-supernaturalism can only be understood as an extreme form of supernaturalism and as opposed to their empirical view of theology.

This extreme form of supernaturalism attempts to reject any cultural form of what men consider to be religion, whether it be mixing natural theology gained by reason with revelation, or equating the literal sense of the Bible with revelation, or equating a particular culture's understanding of the historical Jesus with revelation. "Knowledge of God and God's will is not attained in specific form either intuitively or rationally or through the Bible. But we know the reality of God and God's demand of absolute obedience. This we know by faith, a faith which God himself puts into us."[2] The emphasis in this view is put on the human person's giving absolute obedience now to the all-powerful God who transcends everything in the world. The sense of God's sovereignty and the commitment of oneself unconditionally to this God free the human individual from any egocentric attachment to human values and enables the human individual to examine disinterestedly any human value system.

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[1] Wieman and Meland, p. 77.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 80.

Wieman and Meland affirm neo-supernaturalism's ability to examine disinterestedly any human value system. "The great merit of this formulation of religion is that it opens a way to disinterestedness. Since God is over and above the world, and one's whole devotion is given to God, one can view everything in the world without passion or fear and with an objectivity which is so urgently needed in the turmoil of our present social confusion."[1] But Wieman and Meland find that other forms of philosophy of religion, e.g., the tradition of naturalism, can perform this critical function of religious values just as well as, if not better than, neo-supernaturalism.

In fact, they find that neo-supernaturalism's appeal to a doctrine of revelation, so explicitly severed from any cultural form, weakens neo-supernaturalism's ability to be disinterested, for it could end up in religious agnosticism or in maintaining the status quo in a particular society.

> The most baffling aspect of this philosophy of religion is the theory of knowledge. How do we know anything about God or even know there is a God when all human powers of knowing are incapable of reaching to God? We know because

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[1] *Ibid*., p. 87.

> God reveals himself to those whom he may choose. But how do we know what is God's revelation and what is not? God himself will cause us to know. There is nothing more to say about it.[1]

In Wieman's and Meland's view, more is bound to be said. And it is better for all concerned that, when something is said, the speaker and the audience not be naive about the interconnectedness of a particular revelation with the culture within which it exists.

Behind Wieman's and Meland's presupposition, that all forms of theology and religion are culturally based, is their rootage in the tradition of naturalism which, in their categorization, is the primary exponent of an empirical approach to theology. Wieman and Meland make a distinction between natural theology and naturalism's approach to religion which may help to bring out why they consider naturalism to be empirical theology. In the history of thought, after each major scientific discovery, revelational theology was pressured into forming a natural theology which forced the scientific discovery into the apologetic sieve of theology. Naturalism, on the other hand, is more an "extension of the influence of the scientific movement in philosophy than a continuing phase of natural theology." Thus natural theology of the supernaturalist's tradition has "sought to moderate scientific findings to harmonize them with the essential affirmations of religion," whereas naturalism "has proceeded to trim religion down to the pattern of the scientific outlook."[2]

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., p. 51.

Wieman and Meland state the difference between natural theology and naturalism succinctly in this way: "Naturalism, in other words, has taken its science straight."[1] In the naturalist's view, reality is identified with the world of experience. Religious naturalists do not resort to the kind of irrationalism which supernaturalists propound, viz., an appeal to a God who is beyond or outside our experience. They do admit to a margin of intelligibility which is a recognition of a kind of mysticism which gives overtones of the unknown to our experience; "but always they are overtones that yield to exploration. The philosopher may not have the instruments or method sufficiently perfected to carry on his observations and experiments in that area, but the realm is within bounds of approach. He might enter that promised land some day."[2]

The distinctive feature of the tradition of naturalism is its theory of knowledge. It rejects any traditional concept of revelation. It does affirm the need for reason in a way similar to the tradition of idealism, but to the need for reason it also adds the need for observation and experiment.

> And its peculiarity is that it places emphasis upon the latter. To the naturalist, observation is the aggressive quester for fact; reason is the refiner and the order-giving instrument that builds facts into more comprehensive insights and truths. Thus the philosopher, dominated by the tradition of naturalism, adheres rigidly to the demands of the scientific method, combining reason and observation.[3]

We have offered this brief summary of Wieman's and Meland's contrast between a supernaturalist point of view and a naturalist point of view in order to obtain a contrast with which to judge whether or not Niebuhr's doctrine of God is empirical.

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[1] Ibid., p. 53. [2] Ibid., pp. 53-54. [3] Ibid., p. 54

Niebuhr does not fit Wieman's and Meland's category of "neo-supernaturalism," nor does he fit their category of "naturalism." Niebuhr, unlike the neo-supernaturalist, does admit that this experience takes on cultural embodiment. And, unlike the traditional supernaturalist, he is quite critical of cultural embodiments of the religious experience insofar as these forms take on idolatrous proportions, that is, when something relative is made absolute. On the other hand, Niebuhr, unlike the naturalist, does have a concept of revelation which does not equate God with the processes of life. In Niebuhr's view God exists, and he exists separate from creation and from human experience of him. If men experience him it is because God chooses to let men experience him. Throughout his thought, Niebuhr adheres to a concept of the empirical which says that there is a reality existing independently of our experience of it but that we do experience it and can come to know it. Accordingly he accepts any tested scientific analyses of experience. But in his concept of the empirical, our experience of the divine is as God chooses it to be. Since this experience is not separate from the rest of our human experience, it can be subjected to empirical questioning; but God who chooses to reveal himself in the processes of creation and history is beyond any human analysis.

Niebuhr, it seems, can claim to be an empirical theologian, even in some of the ways Wieman and Meland define the empirical.

But he also differed radically from their concept of the empirical when he affirmed the existence of God separate from our experience of him. The difference between Niebuhr's view of the empirical and Wieman's and Meland's view of it may, in part, be explained by the fact that Niebuhr remained within a Church tradition, whereas the thinkers who have pursued a naturalist's approach to religion, as Wieman and Meland observe, have done so outside the Church tradition. "Intellectually they worked outside of the church tradition. They apparently had no genuine sentiment for this tradition. This indifference to church tradition has been a persistent trait throughout the succession of philosophers who have been dominated by naturalism. They have shown no concern to reconcile truth, scientifically attained, with dogma or faith."[1] We suggest that Niebuhr was attempting to do an empirical theology within a Church tradition. Certainly Niebuhr accepted as parts of his "bias" both a Church tradition and a concern for an empirical approach to the religious experience. Who is to say that, in accepting the bias given him by his rootage in the Church tradition, he made his theology any the less empirical? We do not think that Wieman and Meland have adequately shown us that Niebuhr is not in some way empirical in his theology. That he is not fully "empirical" in their understanding of empiricism, we agree.

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 52.

2. Critique of Niebuhr by Loomer

Though Loomer does not consider the period of growth in Niebuhr's thought from 1920-30, and though he has not read several of the articles of Niebuhr which we consider as integral to understanding why Niebuhr considered his thought empirical, Loomer gives a much more balanced and considered view of Niebuhr than do Wieman and Meland. The fact that Loomer uses The Meaning of Revelation, which we consider an elaboration of H. Richard Niebuhr's reply to his brother, accounts in part for Loomer's treatment being more balanced. Loomer is also careful to hedge his argumentation and is explicit in his treatment of Niebuhr whereas Wieman and Meland treated H. Richard Niebuhr by innuendo. Further, Loomer is much more irenic in his treatment of Niebuhr, for part of Loomer's expressed purpose in his critique of H. Richard Niebuhr is to invite dialogue between religious thinkers, such as Niebuhr, and thinkers of the empirical tradition of theology, such as Loomer.[1]

The topic on which Loomer centers the dialogue between neo-naturalism and neo-orthodoxy is the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. The larger perspective within which Loomer, from his neo-naturalist point of view, wants to place the question of Jesus Christ is the question of God in general. In other words, for him, the question, "How do we know that it was and is God that is disclosed in Jesus Christ?" is only a specific instance of a more general question, namely, "How do we know whether or not it is God that we experience in any event wherein humans say they meet the divine?"

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[1] Loomer uses the classification "neo-orthodox" to characterize Niebuhr, and he uses the classification "neo-naturalist" to characterize empirical theists such as himself. "Neo-naturalism," it seems, fits into Wieman's and Meland's classification of "naturalism." Whether Loomer equates "neo-orthodoxy," at least when said of Niebuhr, with Wieman's and Meland's "neo-supernaturalism" is not clear. When Loomer uses the phrase "neo-orthodox" he qualifies it with the adjective "so-called," and he also recognizes the classification may not best describe the men he treats in this article as "neo-orthodox." See Loomer, p. 79 and p. 80, respectively.

As representatives of the neo-orthodox position on how we know it is God who is revealed in Jesus Christ, Loomer chooses Emil Brunner and H. Richard Niebuhr. Of the two, Loomer finds Niebuhr to be the more penetrating.[1] We are interested in trying to understand in what ways Loomer finds Niebuhr's views to be consonant with some of the ideas of neo-naturalism. A further interest of ours is to see whether or not Niebuhr's own view of "empirical" theology accounts in some way for the resonances which Loomer finds between Niebuhr's thought and his own.

At the outset of this discussion of Loomer's critique of Niebuhr it should be clearly understood that Loomer and Niebuhr do not represent the same point of view. How they disagree will become apparent. What is of interest is how a mutual concern for the empirical allows some kind of understanding between these two divergent points of view.

The element of Niebuhr's thought which Loomer chooses to single out for discussion is Niebuhr's distinction between external history, i.e., history from the point of view of the spectator, and internal history, i.e., history from the point of view of the participant. The two points of view are not opposed. However, to understand the point of view of internal history, one must make an act of faith; internal history ~~is a~~ matter of decision. What one decides in his internal view of history is bound up with his experience of God, for faith and God are inextricably bound up with each other. But individual humans do not make their faith-decision in a vacuum; they make it as part of a community of faith. Loomer quotes the following passage from The Meaning of Revelation.

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[1] "In comparison with Brunner's writings on the subject, I find that Niebuhr's single volume on revelation is more penetrating and revealing." Loomer, p. 88.

> The standpoint of the Christian theologian must be in the faith of the Christian community, directed toward the God of Jesus Christ. Otherwise his standpoint will be that of some other community with another faith and another God. There is no neutral standpoint and no faithless situation from which approach can be made to that which is inseparable from faith.[1]

Loomer finds Niebuhr's emphasis on a living memory of a community essential to what Loomer himself considers to be the task of philosophy and religion. In another part of this essay not explicitly annexed to the discussion of Niebuhr's thought, Loomer states the need for philosophy of religion to be part of a community of belief.

> The type of philosophy of religion that is here envisaged is not the "objective," traditionless, and disinterested type of study which supposedly surveys all religious traditions impartially with a view to constructing a synthetic

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[1] (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1946), p. 37. Loomer quotes from the 1946 publication of MR. All references in this section to MR are from this edition.

> and universal interpretation of religious experience. No inquiry into religion can be that disengaged from its roots Every fruitful inquiry is dependent upon a tradition of inquiry which has helped to shape the very mind and outlook of the inquirer. Philosophy of religion is likewise dependent upon a specific religious tradition. In the field of values and especially in the area of religion (which has to do with one's 'ultimate concern'), one cannot start from scratch, de novo. In religious inquiry one must start with a living faith, an ongoing community, a formative heritage. For us in the West this means the Christian tradition, even though the term "Christian" covers a multitude of interpretations.[1]

From this living memory of belief individuals come to find a center of value, or a point of reference, out of which the rest of history (the external view of history) makes sense. For Niebuhr, the internal history which provides the center of reference is Christian revelation. Loomer quotes the following from Niebuhr: "Revelation means this intelligible event which makes all other events intelligible."[2] Revelation is the discovery of a rational pattern in our lives. Revelation is not therefore in conflict with reason. Niebuhr equates the "reason" of internal history, or revelation, with practical reason and the "reason" of external history with pure reason. Loomer quotes Niebuhr further: " . . . the reason which is correlate with revelation is practical reason, or the reason of self rather than of impersonal mind; it implies that the conflict of practical reason is with practical irrationality, as pure reason is at war with irrationality in the head and not with reason in the heart."[3]

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[1] Loomer, pp. 80-81.

[2] MR, p. 93.

[3] Ibid., p. 94.

Loomer now puts the question to Niebuhr. "How do we know that it was and is God that is disclosed in Jesus Christ?" The answer which Niebuhr provided is "pragmatic," or so concludes Loomer. Loomer admits that his interpretation of Niebuhr's answer as pragmatic is open to question.[1] Our interest here, however, is to see what Loomer means by "pragmatic" in Niebuhr's thought.

The "pragmatic" validation of God's revelation in Jesus Christ is found in this revelation's ability to transform all that which we humans set up as values and as worthy of trust; it transforms all our conceptions of good, life, morality, deity. It is a permanent revolution demanding a total conversion which means a constant and continuous decision not to make anything relative into an absolute. In an earlier description of neo-naturalism in his article, Loomer made the point that, for neo-naturalists, "God's standard of value is compatible with ours--in principle."[2] In his discussion of the "pragmatic" implications of Niebuhr's doctrine of revelation, Loomer sees that Niebuhr's idea of revelation is an enlargement and qualification of the neo-naturalist's principle that God's standard of value is compatible with man's. Niebuhr qualified this principle "by saying, in effect, that this compatibility is due to the transvaluation of man's standard of good."[1] Another way of stating this, is to say that without a faith-commitment to God as God reveals himself, man can only see God as void or as enemy whose standard of value is not compatible with man's; for Niebuhr, the faith-decision and God are inseparable. If one has chosen less than God, then this individual's experience or reality will let him know. A true and valid experience of God will always let us know. Loomer lists several matters of consequence which Niebuhr's idea of revelation lets us know.

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[1] "In this regard I have defined Niebuhr's answer to the question of the good for man as disclosed in Jesus Christ as pragmatic. This interpretation may be questioned. It might be said that the revelation of God in Jesus Christ is self-authenticating, that its significance cannot be tested by other aspects of experience because it judges, evaluates, and transforms all other conceptions and concerns. There is no transcendent vantage point outside or beyond faith by which to evaluate faith. The truth of revelation cannot be ascertained by the living consequences of faith." Loomer, p. 89.

[2] Ibid., p. 83.

> It makes the rest of our history meaningful and intelligible; it unifies our social experience, and it unifies the total self, the practical reason of the heart as well as the pure reason of the head; it enables and compels us to be honest with ourselves, to see ourselves as we really are, causing us to acknowledge what we would deny about ourselves; it judges us and finds us wanting, even as it creates in us the recognition that we find ourselves wanting as judged by our own deepest conception of goodness; and, finally, it revolutionizes our very religion such that we acknowledge this reborn faith to be a nobler and a deeper commitment.[2]

Loomer and Niebuhr are very close to each other on the pragmatic results of belief in God. As we have seen above, Niebuhr did not hesitate to say much about the faith-decision and about man's moral adjustment in the face of that decision. He did, however, hesitate to speak about God. Loomer, on the other hand, does not hesitate to speak about God as well as about man's moral transformation. On this hesitation or lack of it when speaking of God, Niebuhr and Loomer part.

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 89.

[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 89-90.

The reason for their parting company at this point can be seen in the way each explain why it is that an experience of the true God is able to transform man's value-system. For Loomer, the fact that an individual or a group of individuals experiences a transformation in their value-system is because they were ignorant. "But this [the transformation] could only mean that man did not know what was his own true good, that man did not know his own true self."[1] The implication of this statement for Loomer is that man can come to know better his moral responsibility. On this view, coming to know better what true value is means that humans can come to know better who or what God is. In other words, God as part of the human valuation process can be empirically known.

Niebuhr, on the other hand, accounted for the moral transformation which accompanies an experience of the true God by saying that the moral transformation is more than just coming to know oneself better. In this moment of faith-commitment we meet that all-powerful God who values us. Our experience of God is the experience of the totally other in the processes of life. And of this other, Niebuhr would say nothing except that he is; on this point Niebuhr practiced the via negativa of scholastic philosophy with a vengeance.

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[1] Ibid., p. 89.

Niebuhr's reluctance to say anything about God is bound up with his demurral to speak philosophically about God. Loomer is quite correct in picking out this feature in Niebuhr's thought as a basis of disagreement between Niebuhr and himself. Loomer sees this refusal of Niebuhr to speak philosophically about God as a weakness of Niebuhr's thought. Niebuhr, on the other hand, saw it as its strength.

Part of Loomer's reasons for seeing this lack of philosophical reflection as a weakness is bound up with his conviction that any theological statement has a philosophical base. In this view, many of the disagreements between theological schools of thought, e.g., between neo-naturalism and neo-orthodoxy, result because one or both sides are not explicit enough about their philosophical presuppositions. As a result, they cannot dialogue with each other.[1]

We do not think, however, that H. Richard Niebuhr can be accused of close-mindedness. It seems that, in the case of empirical theology, Niebuhr had been willing to listen and argue with empirical theologians down the line. Niebuhr did come up with a value-theory which accounts for many of the concerns of some of the empirical theists as well as the concerns of orthodox Christianity.

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[1] "It is certain that there are religious differences between the various contemporary schools of theological thought. But it is my impression that many of our religious or theological differences are disguised philosophical divergences. For the good of our ecumenical health we need to be clearer about the things wherein we are one and those things wherein we are many." Loomer, p. 91.

Loomer pinpoints the philosophical presupposition behind Niebuhr's reluctance to speak about God as "Neo-Kantian."[1] It seems that Niebuhr opted for a metaphysical dualism with regard to God; and it is true that one of the most recent philosophical statements of a dualistic view of God is Neo-Kantianism. Niebuhr did know this tradition of philosophical thought, e.g., through his study of Troeltsch and Macintosh. Whether or not, however, Niebuhr's refusal to express a philosophical view of God is to be equated with Neo-Kantianism is bound up with how one decides what constitutes an experience of God.

After much philosophical self-awareness, or so it seems to us, Niebuhr said that our experience of God is God's doing, not ours; for this reason, he chose to use the language of orthodox Christian revelation when speaking of God. Niebuhr would say that his understanding of the experience of God, as he had studied it in the faith-decision and in the ethical activity of men affirmed the traditional view of God as transcendent; his reasons for affirming this came from his "empirical" investigation of human value-activity and from his faith-conviction in God's sovereignty. His reasons for not speaking of God directly were bound up with his belief in God's sovereignty and not in his adherence to a Neo-Kantian position.

Loomer finds this appeal to a transcendent God to be philosophically inadequate; and whether or not Niebuhr says so, Loomer equates this dualist view of God with Neo-Kantianism.

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[1] Ibid.

In conclusion, we can say that Loomer finds Niebuhr pursuing a kind of empirical theology--but only to a point. They diverge radically on the question of God. They both agree that man can experience God and that the effects of that experience can be read in the moral consequences in human life. But on the question of God in himself, Niebuhr can be satisfied with the silence of God without at the same time giving up a prophetic challenge to the established forms of religion. In other words, Niebuhr is not concerned to preserve a status quo by his refusal to speculate on God, but rather he is concerned to carry on a constant probing of human ethical activity in order to see that nothing relative is made absolute. Loomer is concerned to understand God better so as to probe the human value-system. Both Loomer and Niebuhr agree on the human side of the religious experience; they disagree on God.

III. Concluding Statements

We come to the conclusion that Niebuhr does not fit into the classification of supernaturalist, whether of the traditional kind or of the new kind, as presented by Barth. Neither does he fit into the classification of naturalist. Where does this leave him?

The answer to this question lies in Niebuhr's doctrine of God. Unlike the supernaturalist, Niebuhr said that his God is in time, which means God is experienced and that this experience takes on a cultural expression known as "religious." Unlike the naturalist, Niebuhr said that this experience of

God is not to be equated with any human value. For Niebuhr, this meant that we cannot speak metaphysically about God in himself, that is, no human experience is prior to, or concomitant with, who or what God is. God is prior to all experience of him.

On the basis of this priority and primacy of God, Niebuhr insisted on the fact that God, first of all, values us, and from this experience we then learn what has the value of deity and how to relate all other values of life in a way which will promote the cause of life. Philosophically Niebuhr rested content with a critical realism which, when applied to the experience of God, meant that we cannot say anything about God in himself. But we can know him in the human relation to him, and this human relation can be studied scientifically. Niebuhr, in other words, refused to speak metaphysically of God in himself, but he did recognize a human experience of God; and he subjected this experience to the scrutiny which is used of all experience by the natural and social sciences. Whether Niebuhr thought that any future philosophical speculation about God in himself would be adequate to express what is experienced in the revelation process is not clear. For himself, the time was not right to speak about God metaphysically.

Niebuhr did develop a theological view of God which he considered adequate to encompass the concerns of an experiential approach to theology and, at the same time, the concerns of Christian orthodoxy. His theological way of speaking of God is bound up with his commitment to Christianity. He gave expression to his theological view of God in the exchange of articles between himself and his brother. This view of God is bound up closely with the Christian tradition's view of God as savior, viz., God is all-good and all-powerful and is to be trusted even when we experience him as judge.

The God of Niebuhr is quite real, that is, he exists independently of any human experience of him. And yet God's independence from human experience does not mean that he is not experienceable. The problem which Niebuhr poses for us concerning God is neither a question of whether God exists nor whether he is experienced; Niebuhr affirmed both the existence of God and the human experience of God. The God problem, as Niebuhr saw it, is to determine which experiences have the quality of deity.

The critical realism of Niebuhr shows up quite clearly in his examination of this problem. Niebuhr was not interested in the human experience from a subjective point of view but rather from an objective point of view. In other words, he was not so much interested in the experiencing as in what is experienced. Since Niebuhr affirmed the prior existence of God and God's primary of action in any experience of him, part of Niebuhr's criterion for determining the quality of deity in what is experienced is to reject any theory which equated God with a human understanding of value or a human understanding of being. On the basis of this criterion, the human experience which carries with it the awareness that we are valued is the experience of God. "That has the value of deity for man which values man. The valuation of which man becomes aware in the religious experience is not first of all his evaluation of a being, but that being's evaluation of him."[1]

Part of this experience of that which is prior to us and which evaluates us is, on the one hand, a negative awareness and, on the other hand, a positive awareness. The negative awareness comes as a judgment; it is the recognition that, whenever humans have made some relative value absolute, they bring upon themselves destruction. This negative awareness is a recognition of a structure in the universe which, if opposed, acts in an almost impersonal way in the fact that it inexorably lets the bent of human idolatry run its course. "That structure of the universe, that will of God, does bring war and depression upon us when we bring it upon ourselves, for we live in the kind of world which visits our iniquities upon us and our children, no matter how much we pray and desire that it be otherwise."[2]

On the other hand, part of the experience of that which is prior to us and which evaluates us is the positive awareness that this power values us, that is, it loves us. And it is this awareness which enables us to trust this structure and enables us to give allegiance to it alone as that which is absolute and prior to all. "But this same structure in things which is our enemy is our redeemer; 'it means intensely and means good' —not the good which we desire, but the good which we would desire if we were good and really wise."[1]

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[1] HRN, "Value-Theory and Theology," p. 116.

[2] HRN, "A Communication . . . ," p. 447.

This negative and positive awareness, when put into Christian theological language, is the awareness that this structure of the universe "is one and the same process which damns and saves."[2] It is Jesus, the revolutionary strategist, who gives full embodiment to this mystery that God is the power who both damns and saves. Through the mystery of his redemptive suffering other humans learn the need for repentance. They learn that they cannot make the Kingdom of God by self-assertion but rather by repentance. " . . . it is possible for him [man], in repentance, to anticipate the judgment, to give up the attempt to preserve or extend the dying system and so to hasten its destruction."[3] This kind of repentance, however, is only possible if there is faith in a deliverance beyond the judgment. With this belief, one can affirm that suffering is not for naught, for it is not an affirmation of human ability to do better and better, but rather an affirmation of a God who is all-powerful and all-good. "This is not a faith in progress, for evil grows as well as good and every self-assertion must be eliminated somewhere and somehow--by innocence suffering for guilt, it seems."[4] "The suffering of innocence for guilt is the only strategy possible if there is to be any cessation of the ceaseless round of self-interests arousing self-interests, of judgments without acceptance of the kingdom of God."[1]

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[1] Ibid.

[2] HRN, "The Social Gospel and the Mind of Jesus," p. 13.

[3] Ibid., p. 17.

[4] HRN, "A Communication . . . ," p. 447.

Niebuhr made these claims for the way of repentance and the power of innocence suffering for guilt on the basis of his critical realism. For him, critical realism meant not only that God exists prior to human experience of him but also that God is found in human experience. As part of time God is both that structure which judges all idolatry and that structure which saves. Though we do not know God in himself, we do experience him as part of life as that which gives purpose and meaning to human value systems.

In Part Two we shall see how Niebuhr's understanding of God's sovereignty, which he came to through developing his idea of critical realism, underlies his doctrine of faith, his theory of relationality, and his theory of value. In all three of these areas of Niebuhr's thought the centrality of God's purposeful action played a key role in Niebuhr's understanding of faith, relationality, and value.

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[1] HRN, "The Social Gospel and the Mind of Jesus," p. 17.

PART TWO

NIEBUHR'S REALISTIC VIEW OF GOD AT THE INTERSECTIONS OF NIEBUHR'S THOUGHT

CHAPTER FOUR

NIEBUHR'S THEORY OF RELATIONALITY AND GOD

In Part One we have seen how Niebuhr's pursuit of critical realism is intimately bound up with his doctrine of God, namely, with God who as the all-powerful one is also the one worthy of the highest trust because he is the all-good one. In Part Two we want to see how this theme of radical monotheism is that which gives consistency to the rest of Niebuhr's thought. Niebuhr's doctrine of God is like a needle through which the rest of his thought is threaded. And just as in sewing, without the needle there would be just a bunch of loose ends and pieces of cloth, so in the thought of Niebuhr, without his understanding of God there would be no consistency and interrelatedness in his own thought and in his appropriation of the thought of the Christian tradition. As it is, there is a definite consistency and interrelatedness in the thought of Niebuhr. It is his doctrine of God which provides this consistency.

We have chosen from the thought of Niebuhr the topics of relationality, value, and faith to see how his doctrine of God is that which gives wholeness to his thought. That these three areas of discussion are of paramount importance in Niebuhr's thought is amply demonstrated by others; we take for granted here the foundational importance of these topics in Niebuhr's thought.[1] Though others in varying degrees have seen how Niebuhr's doctrine of God is important to these areas in his thought,[2] in our judgment, our discussion above of critical realism and Niebuhr's doctrine of God throws new light on the importance of his theory of God for his thought. It is in the light of Niebuhr's understanding of critical realism that we proceed to examine his doctrine of God and these three areas in his thought.

The first topic we shall consider is the place which Niebuhr's conviction of God's sovereignty has in Niebuhr's theory of relationality. We have used the word "relationality" rather than "relativity" because for Niebuhr it is the principle of relationality which is of fundamental importance rather than the principle of relativity. That Niebuhr did not discount relativity is seen clearly both in the way in which he handled revelation under his theory of "historical relativism"[3] and in the way in which he handled value-theory under his theory of "objective relativism."[1] But both of these developments of the principle of relativity in Niebuhr's thought are in function of his principle of relationality. The theory of relationality for Niebuhr can be stated in this way: Everything, whether animate or inanimate, whether intelligent or not, is in relation to everything else because all are in relation to God who is all-powerful and all-good; as the absolute to which all else is related God is not relative, but all else is relative.

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[1] We call attention specifically to Hans Frei, "The Theology of H. Richard Niebuhr," pp. 65-116 and Paul Ramsey, "The Transformation of Ethics," in Faith and Ethics: The Theology of H. Richard Niebuhr, ed. Paul Ramsey (New York: Harper & Row, Harper Torchbook, 1965), pp. 140-72. We also call attention to Jerry Irish, "The Social Self and Historical Relativism," unpublished paper delivered at the Pacific Coast Theological Society, 22 March 1975.

[2] See James W. Fowler, To See the Kingdom, and also Glen Harold Stassen, "The Sovereignty of God in the Theological Ethics of H. Richard Niebuhr," Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1966-67.

[3] See MR, pp. 5-16. As Niebuhr says of his theory of revelation in "Reformation: Continuing Imperative"; "Some of my critics--and, alas, I myself--have called this position one of

By singling out the principle of relationality as the foundational principle in Niebuhr's thought, we do not intend thereby to diminish the force of relativism in Niebuhr's thought. Our use of the word "relationality" is not the same as that of Paul Ramsey in his article on Niebuhr's ethics. One of the major theses of Ramsey's article is to question Niebuhr's use of the term "objective relativism" to describe his relational value-theory. Ramsey suggests that such terms as "objective relatedness," or "relational objectivism," better describe Niebuhr's position.[2] Ramsey recommends these terms, however, as a

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historical relativism, which for some people at once means subjectivism. Historical relationalism is probably a better term, since it does not involve subjectivism" (p. 249). This quotation corroborates our judgment that the principle of relationality is of fundamental importance in Niebuhr's thought and not the principle of relativity.

[1] See HRN, "The Center of Value," p. 174 and HRN, "Value-Theory and Theology," pp. 122-24.

[2] Ramsey, pp. 142 and 156.

way of lessening the force of Niebuhr's understanding of historical relativity and the relative context of all values. Ramsey prefers the term "relatedness" because it points up the objectivity of certain values even when they are related.[1] Our use of the term "relationality," on the contrary, is to highlight the basic relation of everything and everyone to God which relativizes everything but God. In Niebuhr's understanding of radical monotheism precisely because all is related to God everything created is relative.

The basic relation, then, in Niebuhr's principle of relationality is the relation of everything to God. From this relation, Niebuhr developed his value-theory and his doctrine of faith. Our arrangement of the next three chapters builds on this progression in Niebuhr's thought. We treat Niebuhr's theory of relationality before his value-theory and his doctrine of faith because his notion of relationality is integrally bound up with his notions of value and faith. We will try to alleviate repetition in these chapters by using cross-references. Yet redundancy is bound to be part of a study which attempts to lay bare the interconnectedness and consistency of any person's thought which is integral in itself.

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[1] The presupposition behind Ramsey's desire to "correct" Niebuhr's relativism is that relativism, seriously held to, "cannot even be proposed by anyone as the truth about man's situation and truth-getting without cutting out the ground upon which it itself stands." At some point it rests on objective truth. Ibid., pp. 151 and 157.

I. Primordial Character of God-Relation and Its Priority

To say that the relation to God who is all-good and all-powerful is the basic ingredient of Niebuhr's theory of relationality may sound like a restatement of traditional Christianity's affirmation of the sovereignty of God. Indeed, it is, on Niebuhr's own admission.[1] But his affirmation of God's sovereignty is more than dogmatic assertion, for it grows out of his epistemological understanding of faith as relations of trust in and loyalty to God which are, in this epistemological understanding, experiences of God common to all humanity, whether Christian or not.

Not many in the Christian tradition would quibble with Niebuhr in affirming the priority of God. The primacy and priority of God are evident in all Christian doctrine. God is always first; he is creator, redeemer, sanctifier. Some, however, would question Niebuhr's view that all men and women can experience this primacy and priority of God even when not exposed to the Christian revelation. For Niebuhr the God-relation is primordial in human experience, that is, to be human is to place trust and confidence in something as God.[2] The human experience of God is as old as the origin of the human species.

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[1] HRN, "Reformation: Continuing Imperative," p. 248.

[2] "The faith that life is worth living is given with life itself; it lies deeper than any reason. Reason cannot question it because reason works on the basis of its assumption. . . . the question of life is not, Is it worth while? but rather, What makes it worth while?" H. Richard Niebuhr, "Life is Worth Living," Intercollegian and Far Horizons 57 (1939): 4.

The theological problem, as Niebuhr saw it, is not that humans do not believe in God; rather, it is in what they do believe in as having the primacy and priority in their lives. Is it God, or, is it an idol? This question of faith is inherent in the human knowing process.

We have used the word "primordial" in the title of this section to point up the foundational importance of the faith-quality of human existence, a quality which is at the basis of Niebuhr's principle of relationality. Without faith, as trust in and loyalty to someone or something, human beings do not exist as humans. We intend to show that it is Niebuhr's critical realism which enables him, on the one hand, to make this epistemological claim for the God-relation and, on the other hand, to integrate this claim with a traditional Christian doctrine of God.

A. Man-before-God and the Quality of Being Human

The basic element in Niebuhr's understanding of the primordial character of the God-relation is that the quality of one's humanity is in function of the quality of the God in which one places trust and loyalty. The God who is affirmed in this relation is the God whom Niebuhr has come to know through the awareness of radical monotheism present in Christianity and Judaism. Anything less than the principle of being and the principle of good, who is the only universal absolute, is for Niebuhr only a "god," viz., an idol. If one places trust and loyalty in something less than God, one also diminishes his or her humanity. In this chapter we are not interested in seeing how one's relation to God increases or decreases one's humanity (the subject matter of the chapter on Niebuhr's value-theory) nor in examining faith as trust in and loyalty to a cause (the subject matter of the chapter on Niebuhr's doctrine of faith). We are interested in seeing how the God-relation is the cornerstone of Niebuhr's theory of relationality.

The primoridal character of the God-relation suggests a theological anthropology which is broader than that taught by Christianity, but certainly not in opposition to Christian doctrine. In this anthropology, the basic tenet is that all people place confidence in something which makes their lives worthwhile. For Niebuhr, an integral part of this action of placing confidence in another is the human awareness of selfhood. Knowledge of selfhood, in turn, involves being known by another self (a "Thou") which the self (the "I") comes to know in knowing an external reality common to both selves. What we are describing here is the triadic structure of knowledge which is part and parcel of Niebuhr's principle of relationality. We will treat the triadic structure in great detail in the chapter on faith.[1] What we are interested now in pointing out is that, in Niebuhr's principle of relationality, all people put their confidence in something or someone as that which makes life worthwhile.[1] This action of confiding is a religious one, for the someone or something as the center of value has the quality of deity for those giving trust to it.

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[1] See pp. 258-68, below.

The self's awareness of this center of value is intimately connected with the awareness of other selves. An individual's faith in the center of value is part of a community of belief. The community of belief in which Niebuhr has come to know God is the Christian Church. The explicit doctrine about his awareness of God which Christianity has given Niebuhr is radical monotheism. This doctrine does not contravene the epistemological structure of faith which Niebuhr has found in the process of coming to self-awareness and awareness of others common to every human being. Radical monotheism transforms this awareness of God which is implicit in the achievement of selfhood of every individual.

In Niebuhr's affirmation of the primordial character of the God-relation, two things are quite clear: (1) The existence of God is not questioned; it is affirmed; (2) God is personal.[2]

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[1] "It is a curious and inescapable fact about our lives, of which I think we become aware at some time or another, that we cannot live without a cause, without some object of devotion, some center of worth, something on which we rely for our meaning. In this sense all men have faith because they are men and cannot help themselves, just as they must and do have some knowledge of their world, though their knowledge be erroneous." H. Richard Niebuhr, "Faith in Gods and in God," RMWC (New York: Harper & Row, Harper Torchbook, 1970), p. 118. This is a reprint of an essay entitled "The Nature and Existence of God," Motive 4 (December 1943).

[2] These two affirmations are very similar to those made by Macintosh in his empirical theology. In our judgment, Niebuhr is building on what he has learned from Macintosh, though he has also modified what he learned from Macintosh. See pp. 195-96, above.

There is no question about God's existence; all people put confidence in something or someone as their center of value. The personal nature of that center of value is less evident until people begin to question who or what is it that they have placed trust in and given loyalty to. If their center is less than the absolute, their confidence begins to waver; the clay feet of their gods causes them to despair.[1]

Christian revelation for Niebuhr is the redemption of this trust now turned to mistrust. The ability to say "I am valued," or "I am believed in," not just by other humans, but by the principle of being and the principle value, is part of the saving grace given mankind in Jesus Christ.[2]

> Stated non-ecclesiastically this is the principle that the fundamental element in human existence is personal trust and loyalty and further, that if man's relation to his ultimate environment is not one of trust and loyalty all of his particular relations are warped, corrupted. Whatever else needs to be done in order that man may be 'saved' (from personal disintegration, from social destructiveness, etc.) one thing always needs to be done first--his confidence in being, in the source and center of being, must be established. It is with this basic trust and man's basic universal loyalty that the church is concerned. No reasoning

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[1] "It has been said that when the half-gods go the gods arrive. It may not always be true; it may be that for some men when half-gods go nothing comes to take their place. For such men there is only death. For none of us can live without our gods. We cannot live without some source of meaning in life, something that gives life significance. It may be that we can have only temporary gods, the titillations of sense, the passing meanings which we can derive from our work. Some gods we are bound to have if we live. The only way we can live is to live in the light of some meaning, large or small, sufficient or insufficient." Taken from H. Richard Niebuhr, "When the Half-gods Go the Gods Arrive," unpublished sermon, probably written in the early 1930's, p. 1.

[2] MR, pp. 104-105.

> whether in the form of philosophy, science or theology can establish this faith.[1]

What interests us in this quotation is that prior to this transformation of human trust and loyalty by revelation, in Niebuhr's view, there is expressed in human trusting and giving of loyalty an experience of the God-relation, however misplaced and misinterpreted it may be. "Men always live for some purposes, they have some objects of devotion, which give meaning to their lives. Without such devotion men simply do not live."[2] Revelation then for Niebuhr is less a propositional affair than it is a transformation of this human trust and loyalty. "To say that God makes himself known as First Person is to say that revelation means less the disclosure of the essence of objective being to minds than the demonstration to selves of faithful, truthful being."[3] For the monotheistic believer, "there seem to be indications in the whole of the responsive, accountable life of men of a movement of self-judgment and self-guidance which cannot come to rest until it makes its reference to a universal other and a universal community, which that other both represents and makes his cause."[4]

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[1] H. Richard Niebuhr, "Reflections on a 'Protestant Theory of Higher Education,'" unpublished paper given at Greenwich, Conn., 12-14 November 1959, p. 2.

[2] H. Richard Niebuhr, "Threat and Promise in Our Crisis," unpublished essay, undated, pp.6-7. In RMWC Niebuhr indicated that maybe he is "too bold to assert such relations of faith are universal among human selves." But he went on to show that even disvaluers of value and unbelievers in faith espouse some kind of source or center of value. He concluded that there is apparently a "universal human necessity of faith and of the inescapability of its gods, not as supernatural beings but as value-centers and objects of devotion." RMWC, pp. 22-23.

[3] RMWC, p. 46

[4] RS, pp. 86-87.

By interpreting all actions as related to an ultimate principle of unity, which is also the principle of integrity, viz., that which is always faithful and loyal, mankind comes to its own integrity. "As revelation so considered means the event in which ultimate unity is disclosed as personal or faithful, so the human response to such revelation is the development of integrated self-hood." In face of the trustworthiness of God, the result in humans is an awareness "which elicits the confidence of selves in their ultimate environment and calls upon them as free selves to decide for the universal cause."[1]

The implications of the primordiality of God-relation for theology per se, in Niebuhr's view, is that dogmatic theology does not take precedence over theological ethics. Both are studies of the triadic structure wherein faith takes place, viz., the triad of self, companions, and God.

> There is no first and second here. There is no question about the priority, the Lordship, the Sovereignty of that God before whom man knows himself. But priority in being and value is not at all identifiable in knowledge. Insofar as theology deals critically with the knowledge of God before and toward men, it is dealing with a reality incomparably, infinitely greater and other than the reality with which an ethics that begins with man-before-God. But it is quite impermissible to make the knowledge of the first, a first knowledge from which the second is derivative. Man's apprehension of himself before God as sinner, as guilty, as beloved and forgiven, as commanded and empowered, is not derivative from theology, which must always deal secondhand with the knowledge of God. Insofar as ethics begins with man's knowledge of himself before God, it begins with no "Lehrsaetze" from dogmatics, but with what is given and as accessible . . . to the Christian ethicist as to the theologian. If by dogmatics we mean

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[1] RMWC, p. 47.

> that discipline which is directed toward the critique of the knowledge of God before man, and by ethics that discipline which is directed toward the critique of man's knowledge of himself before God, then indeed dogmatics is theological and ethics anthropological, but both are theocentric and the double knowledge with which they are concerned is not mediated to them by each other but as accessible to the one as to the other.[1]

Though this quotation refers explicitly to a revelational context, it also describes the general epistemological understanding of Niebuhr that all people do experience God. On the one hand, it points out the relativity of any human knowledge about God and man before God and, on the other hand, it points out that, however relative, this knowledge is expressive of an actual experience of the absolute, whether it be a negative experience of God as void or enemy, or a positive experience of God as friend.

Though the God-relation for Niebuhr is bound up with Christian revelation, we have seen that he considered this relation as a transformation of an experience of the God-relation common to all men and women. "Revelation is not a development of our religious ideas but their continuous conversion."[2] Niebuhr's recognition of an experience of the God-relation which is broader than the Christian one is his way of reconciling Christian revelation with a contemporary world view which in part builds on an empirical point of view. By understanding the Christian relation to God as a specialization, a refinement, a transformation, of the larger, common God-relation, Niebuhr thought that he had liberated Christians from the awkward position vis-à-vis natural science and social science of claiming for itself a special knowledge totally uncommunicable to others who did not share the Christian point of view. Niebuhr did not want Christian revelation to be forced to the epistemological stance which so exempted it from ordinary human experience that it would become arcane and incommunicable.

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[1] HRN, "Theology and the Critique of the Christian Life," (basis for a paper: "Does Christian Ethics Have Theological Basis"), unpublished essay, 1958, p. 12.

[2] MR, p. 133.

> Despite all difficulties that we have in speaking of it, revelation does not mean for us something we can do without or something that is incommunicable. It is true that revelation is not the communication of new truths and the supplanting of our natural religion by a supernatural one. But it is the fulfillment and the radical reconstruction of our natural knowledge about deity through the revelation of one whom Jesus Christ called "Father."[1]

The primordial character of the God-relation in Niebuhr's thought is part of his epistemological understanding of faith as trust in and loyalty to a center of value. All people express such confidence, though often it is placed in something less than God, or often it is expressed as mistrust. Revelation, in this view, is a transformation of a relation which is already there in human experience. That relation is bound up with how the "I" becomes a self. In this section we do not need to examine Niebuhr's social idea of self, but we do need to see that the other by which the self radically exists is bound up with what we absolutely trust in and are undyingly loyal to. This radical relation is the relation of the self to God. "The self as one self among all the systematized reactions in which it engages seems to be the counterpart of a unity that lies beyond, yet expresses itself in, all the manifold systems of actions upon it. In religious language, the soul and God belong together; or otherwise stated, I am one within myself as I encounter the One in all that acts upon me." For Niebuhr the integrity of the self and, therefore, the quality of that self's moral action hinges on that self seeing itself in an ultimate relation to God and affirming this Other with love and trust. ". . . insofar as in (faith) trust I acknowledge whatever acts upon me, in whatever domain of being, is part of, or participates in, one ultimate action, then though I understand nothing else about the ultimate action, yet I am now one."[1] From this position of integrity the self can then affirm, "God is acting in all actions upon you. So respond to all actions upon you as to respond to his action."[2]

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[1] Ibid., pp. 132-33.

For Niebuhr, as for many Christians, the way to this kind of personal integrity is bound up with the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. But Niebuhr did not preclude others, who are not Christians, from this relation to God, and he did not exempt them from the task of seeking integrity. Each man and woman has the potentiality of seeking this kind of self-integrity; and each must do so in his or her own way.

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[1] RS, p. 122.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 126. Another statement of this principle is found in Niebuhr's handwritten notes for his class on ethics, 12 May 1961: "The principle of Christian response to all limiting action upon us: Respond to all limiting action so as to respond primarily to the action of God in the action of all finite agencies."

II. Historical Relationalism and the God-Relation

Inherent in Niebuhr's principle of relationality is a principle of relativity. For Niebuhr, everything and everybody is in relation to God and, because of that fact, is relative. "In faith, because we believe, we are made aware of our relativity and our relatedness."[1] Since part of the human experience of the God-relation, in Niebuhr's analysis of it, is to affirm something or someone as absolute, the experience of the relativity of everything else but God is not an experience of utter chaos and disorder. "Just because faith knows of an absolute standpoint it can therefore accept the relativity of the believer's situation and knowledge."[2] The problem with the human experience of the God-relation, as Niebuhr saw it, was not lack of trust but rather misplaced trust.

Niebuhr's realism led him to affirm the existence of God. Niebuhr however knew that, even though God's relation to man is not qualified by human acceptance or rejection of the divine sovereignty, a person's relation to God is qualified by his or her being situated in space and time.[3] In other words, the human relation to God is historically qualified, which is to say, that a person's relation to God is not defined in abstractions provided either by a metaphysics or by a propositional kind of faith. As Niebuhr put it, ". . . I do not see that faith comes to me or to my fellowmen through any doctrines about what lies back of the historical event. It comes to me in history, not in doctrines about history."[1]

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[1] CC, p. 234. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 239. [3] RS, pp. 44-45.

Niebuhr's insistence on the historical setting of faith is built up on the principle of mediated experience of the absolute. Stated negatively, this principle says that there is no direct experience of God. All experience of God as the absolute and universal is mediated, that is, it happens in a spatial-temporal setting. Niebuhr derived this principle from his epistemological stance which we have called critical realism. Critical realism says that humans do indeed know a reality separate from the human mind, but they experience this reality in a mediated fashion and not immediately. On the basis of this principle of mediated knowledge of God, Niebuhr criticized (1) naturalism, (2) scripturalism, and (3) mysticism, understood here as an individual's claim to direct and immediate experience of God.

Naturalism is for Niebuhr the attempt to interpret the experience of God as found in nature without relying on a historical tradition. Niebuhr said that there is no such direct experience of God free from a historical perspective. "As natural rather than historical theologians, we try to divorce nature from history and ask men to listen to its praise of the Creator. But such theology is also implicitly historical. . . . We cannot point in space to spatial things or in a general time to generally temporal things, saying that what we mean by the word of God and by revelation can be known if men will but look together at stars and trees and flowers."[1] Though the intent of Niebuhr in this quotation was not to attack naturalism per se, what is evident in these comments on natural theology is that if we do not admit our historical origins, viz., that our commitment to God is made from a relative point of view, then we will end up equating our experience with the absolute rather than seeing it as our relation to the absolute. History means that our experience of the absolute is mediated and not immediate. Therefore a Christian experience of nature is revelatory of God, not because of the fact that the Christian experiences God directly in nature but because a historical faith helps him or her to interpret nature. "Nature regarded through our history is indeed a symbol of what we mean, a pointer to God; but nature uninterpreted through our history and faith, or torn out of this context and placed in another does not indicate what we mean."[2]

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[1] HRN, "Reformation: Continuing Imperative," p. 249. "Metaphysical systems have not been able to maintain the intellectual life of our community and abstract systems of morality have not conveyed devotion and the power of obedience with their ideals and imperatives. Idealistic and realistic metaphysics, perfectionist and hedonistic ethics have been poor substitutes for the New Testament, and churches which feed on such nourishment seem subject to spiritual rickets." MR, p. 35.

The naturalist may claim that humans experience God directly in natural processes and that, through patient examination of these processes, mankind will come to know better who or what God is. Such a claim, however, is to say that our experience of God, whether in nature or in human society, is not historical insofar as there is a claim to knowing God directly. Such realism in theology forgets that this interpretation of nature is itself historically conditioned. For this reason, Niebuhr did not espouse a metaphysical system such as process philosophy or a type of theistic naturalism. If it is a matter of what to commit oneself to, Niebuhr would, and did, prefer to make that commitment to a person rather than to a theory.

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[1] MR, p. 36.

[2] Ibid.

Niebuhr also rejected any theory about revelation which said that somehow in Jesus Christ we have had an immediate experience of God which thereby becomes the instrument with which we judge all experience of God. Niebuhr did not agree with a scripturalism which says "that though we are historical beings we can still contemplate from this moving point we occupy a super-historical word of God."[1] Such an affirmation of a super-historical word of God is to claim a direct experience of God, insofar as it claims absoluteness for this human document, as if somehow these words are God's words directly spoken. Niebuhr contended that this scripture is only known in its historical context. ". . . it is evident that when the church speaks of revelation it never means simply the Scriptures, but only Scriptures read from the point of view and in the context of church history."[2]

Niebuhr's critique of an individual's claim to have a direct religious experience of God through some numinous experience or through some moral sense is the same as his critique of the above two claims to know God directly. "Religious experience and moral sense are to be found in many different settings and can be interpreted from many points of view."[1] They are historically conditioned and they offer "us no way of avoiding the use of our history in saying what we mean."[2]

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[1] _Ibid_., p. 37.

[2] _Ibid_.

As we saw above, the experience of the God-relation is bound up intimately with how a human becomes a self. We now see that to be a self is intimately bound up with being a historical being. There are two basic ways of viewing this history of the self and how it comes to experience the God-relation. On the one hand, we can observe this history as a spectator treating it as an object; on the other hand, we can participate in it as one deeply engaged in it.

Niebuhr's distinction between an external and an internal history is built on his epistemological principle that knowledge is mediated. A corollary of this epistemological understanding is that there are two ways of knowing, namely, on the one hand as observer and on the hand as participant. The consequence of human finiteness is that a human being cannot experience reality from both points of view at the same time; a human can and does experience both kinds of knowing but only in succession. "Being finite souls with finite minds in finite bodies men are confined to a double and partial knowledge which is yet not knowledge of double reality."[3]

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 39. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 40. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 61

It is important to note that Niebuhr's epistemological dualism does not mean a metaphysical dualism. Reality is one; knowledge of reality is from an inner perspective and from an outer perspective. Niebuhr was adamant in his stand against any doctrine of revelation which split reality into two realms. He opposed any notion of the supernatural which made of this other-worldly reality an "antinaturalism" or an "unnaturalism."[1] Niebuhr's epistemological realism underlies his opposition to this kind of supernaturalism. He rejected any supernaturalist view which built up on a notion of miraculous intervention which suspended the ordinary processes of human thought. "The consequence of this method of argument was that two systems of reality on the same plane--a natural, historical, rational system and a supernatural, super-historical and super-rational system--were set beside each other. They were on the same plane, perceived by the same organs of sense and apprehended by the same minds, yet there was no real relation between them."[2]

In criticizing this extreme kind of supernaturalism, Niebuhr did not reject the two-world thinking so prevalent in Christianity. He did want, however, to explain this dualism in epsitemological terms rather than in metaphysical terms. By doing so, he wished to avoid the conflict which had arisen between theology and the natural and social sciences. "The two aspect theory allows us to understand how revelation can be in history and yet not be identifiable with miraculous events as visible to an external observer and how events that are revelatory in our history, sources of unconquerable certainty for us, can yet be analyzed in profane fashion by the observer."[1]

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[1] H. Richard Niebuhr, "Toward a New Other-Worldliness," Theology Today 1 (1944): 82.

[2] MR, p. 55.

Niebuhr had no desire to explain away the this-wordly, other-worldly dynamic found in Christianity. He did want to avoid the extreme of one-worldly thinking whether as this-worldliness or as other-worldliness. He acknowledged that his "theory does not solve the problem of unity in duality and duality in unity. It only states the paradox in a new form and every paradox is the statement of a dilemma rather than an escape from it. It is important, of course, that a paradox be correctly stated and that false simplicity be avoided."[2]

At the base of Niebuhr's restatement of the dualism in Christianity is his epistemological stance which we have called critical realism. As part of critical realism Niebuhr affirmed the Kantian epistemology which says that we never know reality in itself but always in relation to human experience of it. Niebuhr added to this epistemology by incorporating the awareness of spatial and temporal relativity into his theory of epistemology. This added understanding is: "The understanding that the spatio-temporal point of view of an observer enters into his knowledge of reality, so that no universal knowledge of things as they are in themselves is possible, so that all knowledge is conditioned by the standpoint of the knower."[1] With the principle of relativity Niebuhr could say of the human mind "that our reason is not only in space-time but that time-space is in our reason."[2]

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 60.

[2] *Ibid.*

Niebuhr's interest in epistemology was part of his concern to explain the human experience of the God-relation. By accepting the limitations of the human mind which he learned from critical philosophy and by accepting the relativity of the categories of the human mind which he learned from critical history and sociology, Niebuhr had the tools with which to examine the reality of God and the human experience of that reality. Niebuhr's use of Critical realism in theology gave rise to what he called "critical historical theology."[3]

> Critical philosophy and critical theology accepted the limitations imposed on the rational subject by a new self-knowledge and undertook the apparently humble task of criticizing, interpreting and guiding experience with the aid of limited principles. So in our time the recognition of reason's historical limitations can be for theology in particular, as for the social sciences in general, the prelude to faithful critical work in history and in historically apprehended experience.[4]

The basic ingredient of Niebuhr's critical historical theology is his epistemological dualism.

> I begin with the inescapability of the subject-object situation, its dialectical character, and hence in the untenability of either complete objectivism or complete subjectivism as an explanation of any knowledge. The

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[1] *Ibid*., p. 5.

[2] *Ibid*., p. 7.

[3] *Ibid*., p. 15.

[4] *Ibid*., pp. 12-13.

> knower and the known are bound together till death parts them.[1]

The polarity of Niebuhr's thought is very evident in this statement of his epistemology. He did not accept the "either" of an idealist epistemology nor the "or" of an empirical epistemology. He objected against the cult of objectivity which he found propounded by some who were in the natural and social sciences. For Niebuhr, objectivity is bound to subjectivity. We can choose to study one or the other aspect of the polarity, but we cannot separate the two. Human knowledge of reality is mediated.

The primary way knowledge is mediated is through history, that is, through others. In fact, without another person there would be no knowledge in the subject-object dialogue.

> Yet knowledge does not happen in the subject-object dialogue unless the subject is also related to another knower, to a companion, or companions engaged as he is in dialogue with objects and also engaged in a dialogue with him. All knowledge contains an element of interpretation and it is social. The forms and categories with which we come to our objects are apriori so far as individuals are concerned, but their source seems to be not in a 'pure reason' so much as in the social mind and they are mediated to us not by remembrance of a former state of the soul but by our companions from childhood onward. These ideas or forms are not so fixed and established that they cannot be modified in consequence of our individual and present experience of objects. Yet the social categories are indispensable to any experience. Further we depend on our companion knowers for verification. Purely private knowledge, not subject to social verification, remains so dubious as to be . . . hallucination.[2]

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[1] H. Richard Niebuhr, "A Theologian's Approach to History: History's Role in Theology," unpublished address given to the American Historical Association, 30 December 1955, p. 3.

[2] Ibid.

Two things are apparent in Niebuhr's epistemological methodology. On the one hand, there is his realist position which affirms the reality of things outside of human perception. On the other hand, there is his critical position which says that, before a human can say that he or she knows that reality "objectively," that person must know his or her "subjective" side, viz., how the self is formed by its commitment to a community.

> For reflective criticism no objects of inquiry are available just in themselves, in abstraction from an interpreting community. This is not to say that the inquirer has no direct relations to the object; if he had none, criticism would be impossible. It is to say that such relations are not separable from relations to a community in which interpretation goes on. Reflective criticism is possible in a situation in which object, subject and community; or object, subject and co-subjects; are all present. In such a situation we cannot make an absolute beginning with one of the terms but only with all three.[1]

The importance of Niebuhr's epistemological position is the clarity with which he describes the situation, or the context, of the human knowing process. That situation, briefly stated, is that as knowers we humans are engaged in a double dialogue, one with the objects of our knowledge and one with our fellow knowers.

> . . . we may direct primary attention to one or the other dialogue. Hence arises a great division in the human sciences between those which are directed primarily to the common objects, which are engaged in conversation with a sensible and intelligible present objectiveness, and those

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[1] H. Richard Niebuhr, "The Church Defines Itself in the World," unpublished paper given at the North American Section of the Christ and Church Commission of the World Council of Churches' Faith and Order Commission, 1958, p. 1. The triadic relation of knowledge is an important theme in Niebuhr's understanding of faith. We will treat more fully of this triad in our chapter on Niebuhr's doctrine of faith.

> which are concerned first of all with the fellow-knowers, fellow artists and artisans. The distinction does not lie between the natures of our objects. I may regard a human being primarily as an object or primarily as a fellow-subject. In the former case I am a physiologist or psychologist, in the latter case a humanist. I may try to know a political society from the outside, as subject engaged in a dialogue with this object; but I may also try to think with it or its members, participate in its common life, practice empathy, engage in dialogue with its members as fellow-subjects. In the former case I am a political scientist, in the latter probably a historian.[1]

For Niebuhr there is no knowledge of God in himself; all knowledge of God is bound up with knowledge of self. Since in Niebuhr's view all theoretical knowledge (objective knowledge) is based on practical knowledge (subjective knowledge), the object of the theological endeavor is the relation between God and man. "As theologian this is my object--God before men and men before God. Objectively stated it is God as he is in himself; subjectively stated it is human experience of God; but I cannot separate object from subject and hence I say my object is God before men including myself in my subjectivity before this object, and men before God, including God in the objectivity before these subjects."[2] Critical realism then, as Niebuhr uses it in theology, is to help the church theologian understand the human (subjective) side of the God-relation as part of the common way in which people know.

> Reflective criticism does not seek to discover the principles of reasoning in the subjective mind of the church in

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[1] HRN, "A Theologian's Approach to History: History's Role in Theology," pp. 3-4.

[2] Ibid., p. 5.

> abstraction from the objective reality to which that mind is related or on which it is dependent; it is not concerned with God-consciousness apart from God or with faith apart from the trusted, faithful One. On the other hand, in the method of reflective criticism we do not assume that a relation to the objective counterpart of the church's mind is open to us in isolation from the common consciousness.[1]

In Niebuhr's view, the common consciousness of the God-relation in mankind is not a theoretical understanding but rather a practical understanding, that is, it is bound up with how an individual becomes a "self," and this knowledge, in turn, is bound up with the knowledge of other selves.

> Our knowledge of other persons differs from our knowledge of objects externally regarded not only by being directed toward different aspects of reality but also by being a relationship between different terms. . . . We cannot know here save as we are known. We cannot be the doers but must first suffer knowledge of ourselves. To know a knower is to begin with the activity of the other who knows us or reveals himself to us by his knowing activity. No amount of initiative on our part will serve to uncover the hidden self-activity. It must make itself manifest or it cannot be known.[2]

In terms of God, we do come to know who or what God is by our awareness that he values us and that he knows us. That knowledge becomes our personal commitment to God as the principle of being and the source of good. In other words, our theoretical knowledge of God is bound up with our practical knowledge.

> A definition always involves the activity of both practical and theoretical reasoning in the subject. . . . I do not mean to say that theoretic definition is controlled by decision or choice, or the latter by the former but only that in every case of definition--of ourselves particularly--both

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[1] HRN, "The Church Defines Itself in the World," p. 1.

[2] MR, pp. 105-106.

> elements are involved. When man defines himself theoretically, he also defines himself practically--i.e. he chooses what he wills to be in obedience to imperatives --and he never describes himself except in the course of choosing himself.[1]

Each individual must choose what he wants to define himself by. The most basic choice of all is who or what he chooses as his God.

In Niebuhr's view, no one makes these choices in a situation which is not historical. We come to know God "with categories, ideas, patterns of relationship, with certain *aprioris* of experience."[2] We learn these *a prioris* from our culture. Each person's belief in God is part of a community of belief. This belief however is not primarily or, first of all, a theoretical thing but rather a decisional or a practical affair.

> The tendency in theology today is to regard true doctrine as the basis for right decision. It is the contention of this paper that such priority of the intellect over the will, or better of the speculative or observant over the practical reason is not self-evident. . . . It is not questioned that such beliefs belong to a church, but it is contended that to assign priority to doctrine is to make a choice, not to be obedient simply to a givenness in things, whether in Scripture or human experience. To define faith primarily in terms of belief rather than of trust and fidelity, to define it therefore as intellectural assent more than as practical decision, is possible only on the basis of choice.[3]

The decisions by which people define themselves in their most basic relation are part of Niebuhr's value-theory. The criterion by which they can judge whether or not they have chosen God or an idol as their center of value is bound up with a revelation of God as the absolute power of being and the source of all good. For Niebuhr this revelation was conditioned by his own place within Christianity. Christianity was his fate,[1] for it was within the Christian community that he had been given the language and symbols with which to speak of his relation to God. Niebuhr's being situated in Christianity did not give him the right to exclude non-Christian interpretations of the God-relation.[2] Nor did Niebuhr's particular understanding of Christ give him the means by which to judge whether or not another Christian had placed his trust in God.[3]

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[1] HRN, "The Church Defines Itself in the World," p. 2.

[2] HRN, "A Theologian's Approach to History: History's Role in Theology," p. 5; see also RS, pp. 96-97.

[3] HRN, "The Church Defines Itself in the World," p. 5.

Niebuhr's principle of relationality leads quite readily into a discussion of his value-theory and his doctrine of faith, the subject matter of the next two chapters. Without an understanding of the principle of relationality in Niebuhr's thought, his value-theory and his doctrine of faith are incomprehensible. We now proceed to examine in greater detail how the God-relation is the basic ingredient in Niebuhr's value-theory and his doctrine of faith.

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[1] RS, p. 112.

[2] RS, pp. 44-45.

[3] CC, p. 233.

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CHAPTER FIVE

THE GOD-RELATION AND NIEBUHR'S THEORY OF VALUE

The major part of H. Richard Niebuhr's academic career was spent in teaching theological ethics. The element that marked out Niebuhr's ethical study as theological and distinguished it from a philosophical consideration of man's moral activity came less from Niebuhr's adherence to a Christian dogmatic tradition and more from his examination of the process of valuation in human life. It is not suggested that Niebuhr did not use the Christian tradition to interpret man's moral life, for that is not so. But we have seen how Niebuhr, on the one hand, considered ethics as part of the theological discipline on an equal footing with dogmatic theology and, on the other hand, considered the material of ethical behavior as accessible to theologians as well as to persons who do not adhere to a Christian theological understanding.[1]

Stated epistemologically, Niebuhr did not claim any special status for Christian knowledge of human moral behavior which made it somehow discontinuous from the rest of human knowledge. The point at which Niebuhr's study of ethics took on a theological character was his examination of the valuation process. Niebuhr attempted to treat this valuation process as critically and as realistically as he could. He recognized that part of his limitation as a human being made it necessary for him to approach this valuation process from a culturally determined point of view. In his case, his relation to the valuation process was a Christian relation. But the reality he studied was larger than his relation to it, and was available for any human to know and to study.

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[1] See pp. 211-12, above. See H. Richard Niebuhr, The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry (New York: Harper & Row, 1956), pp. 112-18.

We need to study in greater detail in what ways Niebuhr's examination of the process of valuation made his ethical study theoretical in a manner which also made it available to men and women who did not adhere to the Christian faith. Niebuhr's effort to put varying viewpoints of a common object into dialogue with each other is characteristic of his irenic approach to questions that often put men and women on the defensive. His irenic spirit is also characteristic of his use of critical realism.

We have already seen how Niebuhr, on the basis of critical realism, attempted to put proponents of traditional Christianity and proponents of modern and contemporary views of a scientific, empirical mentality into dialogue with one another. The basic ingredient of this dialogue, in Niebuhr's view, is the God-relation. Our task in this chapter is to see how Niebuhr's understanding of the God-relation is the foundation of his theory of the human valuation-process and how Niebuhr's value-theory is part of his critical realism.

I. Relationality and Value-Theory

The basic element in Niebuhr's ethics is valuation. Before one deals with the rightness or wrongness of an act, one must deal with the actual process of valuation. Value judgments are decisions on the basis of which a person chooses to act. Value judgments therefore are acts of commitment before they are statements of rightness and wrongness. "For decisions, though they are concerned not with moral acts but are themselves moral acts of the first instance--subject to praise and blame, approval and disapproval--are made in the presence of valued objects or states of mind or ideals."[1] "The acts on which human beings pass judgment as good or evil, right or wrong, are always acts in which valuation has taken place and our value judgments on them are always secondary."[2]

What needs to be underlined is that for Niebuhr the fundamental moral act is the process of valuing and not some standard of judgment on human behavior. "Man's fundamental moral act seems to be that of valuing. We approve and we disapprove; we love and we hate; we are attracted and we are repelled. However we define 'moral' we discover that valuation is ingredient in it."[3] The first requirement then for an adequate study of morality is to recognize the inevitability of valuation.

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[1] H. Richard Niebuhr, "I and II: Responsibility to Divine Action: I. Valuation; II. The Locus of the Christian Ethos," (The beginnings of two chapters for a proposed book, handwritten in the 1960's, it seems), p. 1.

[2] Ibid., pp. 2-3

[3] Ibid., p. 1.

> There is no escape from valuation. In the modern world with its very high estimate of the scientific approach to whatever is or "is the case," men sometimes seek so to escape. They may demand, for instance, that ethics be made scientific and when they are pressed to state what they mean by their phrase they tend to assert the superiority of knowledge of fact to value-judgments, or otherwise they assert that truth is the first and most important of all human possessions. But these are both value-judgments and not themselves statements of fact. It is a fact that men make value-judgments and must make them, implicitly or explicitly, in this very act of denying them. In such statements as those cited above, the value-judgment is explicit. When men devote themselves simply to science without making statements about its worth their value-judgments are implicit; they devote themselves to their enterprise; therefore it has for them the highest value among human activities; it is the most important thing they can do.[1]

In this section we want to see how Niebuhr used a relational view of the human valuation process to develop a realistic value-theory. After considering Niebuhr's relational theory of value we will proceed in the next section to a discussion of God as the Center of value and the role of the Center of value in Niebuhr's relational theory of value.

A. Realistic Basis of Valuation

For Niebuhr, the great divergence among human value-systems did not mean that ethical study was therefore not in contact with reality. First, he pointed out the difference between objective sciences which use observational techniques and subjective sciences which use reflective techniques. Then he insisted that the latter was in as much contact with reality as the former.[1]

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[1] Ibid., p. 3.

In ethics, where one deals with decisions, the tool perforce is self-reflection. To avoid subjectivism and individualism, Niebuhr employed a social concept of self-reflection. For this social view of mind and self, Niebuhr drew in particular from George H. Mead and Martin Buber,[2] as well as from his own theory about the social existence of humanity.

Though Niebuhr never got into the complete empiricism that Mead espoused, our contention is that Niebuhr used Mead because he found in him a realism that idealistic views of the human mind did not contain.[3] In other words, Niebuhr's epistemological realism led him to develop a social view of the self. It is this realistic concern which gives an empirical flavor to Niebuhr's examination of the human valuation process and to the place the God-relation has in Niebuhr's theory of value.

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[1] For a more complete statement of Niebuhr's epistemological understanding of the two ways of knowing either as observer or as participant, see pp. 222-25, above.

[2] See RS, pp. 71-73.

[3] "In our effort to understand ourselves and selves in general in Christian perspective we have begun with ideas about the self to which psychologists and philosophers call attention. Psychology of personality; existential philosophers and ontologists such as Paul Weiss. We shall use others, the social psychologists--G. H. Meade [sic]. Not because they are authorities whom we believe but because with their aid we note certain things about ourselves that may escape our attention if we do not heed them." Taken from H. Richard Niebuhr, "Classroom Lectures on Christian Ethics," for 22 February 1961.

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In an article describing the relationship between conscience and the ego-alter dialectic, Niebuhr developed a relational view of man which explicitly built on the empirical understanding of the self that Mead taught.[1] Niebuhr did not hold to a total empirical view such as Mead taught, viz., that the self, the mind, the "soul," are terms used to refer only to what is given us in a social situation. Niebuhr taught an interpretation of the duality of the knowing subject which differed from that of Mead, for Niebuhr held to a notion of the soul as that which transcends the body. Physical reality does not totally account for the reality of the human person. He allowed for the reality of the self outside of the social situation. As he said, "We know ourselves only in the presence of another; we are not entitled to affirm on this ground that we exist only in the presence of another."[2]

In this article, Niebuhr attempted to synthesize, or at least keep in a tension, the views both of idealism and of empiricism on the human knowing subject. On the one hand, he affirmed in part the idealistic position about human nature: ". . . the idealists are right; the self is both transcendent and empirical."[3] On the other hand, he affirmed in part what the empiricist had to say about the duality of the human knowing

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[1] H. Richard Niebuhr, "The Ego-Alter Dialectic and the Conscience," The Journal of Philosophy 42 (1945): 353. In this article Niebuhr quotes from two works of Mead: (1) G. H. Mead, Mind, Self and Society (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934), p. 138; and (2) G. H. Mead, The Philosophy of the Present (Chicago: Open Court Publ. Co., 1932).

[2] Ibid., p. 353.

[3] Ibid.

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subject in their discussion of the self in terms of the ego-alter dialogue. In this article Niebuhr stated that "the empiricists appear to have directed attention to a more fundamental factor than the idealists have done with their interest in the rational-empirical dualism."[1]

What is of interest to us in this article is how Niebuhr used the results of an empirical view of man which came from a type of behavioristic psychology to develop his own theory of man. The focus of attention in this article is "the phenomenon of duality in the self,"[2] which arises in the moral dialogue. Niebuhr used the insights of Mead into the experience of duality in knowing self to reinterpret the body/soul duality theory of man, which he knew from Christian tradition and idealist philosophy. As we have discussed above, Niebuhr did hold to the existence of a realm of the spiritual which can be called "supernatural." But he was always careful when using this term to distinguish it from other understandings of the term which made this realm of the spiritual discontinuous with nature.[3] Niebuhr's use of the empiricist's understanding of duality in the knowing subject is a clear instance of Niebuhr's attempts to present traditional Christian concepts in a way comprehensible to empirical, realistic points of view. It is also a clear instance of how Niebuhr went about presenting a realist view of the supernatural.

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[1] *Ibid.*

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 352.

[3] See pp. 103-104 and 220-21, above.

It is true that Niebuhr never accepted a totally "empirical" view of the self, just as he did not accept a totally "empirical" view of God. But he was interested to speak about the self and God in a realistic way similar to empirical views, that is, in terms of a relational view of self which explains in social terms the duality that persons experience in knowing themselves.

The basic ingredient of a social concept of self is that such knowledge is mediated to the self. This mediation is a relational activity, for it means that the self is a dialogue between the knower and the known, between the subject and the object. The self is not directly an object to itself. The experience of the self as self is to know itself as an object, and a self becomes an object for itself insofar as it takes into consideration the attitudes of other selves to itself. These attitudes are given to the self within a social environment, or a context of experience and behavior, in which both the self and other selves are involved. "The self can be both subject and object because it is a social being which knows itself through the mediation of another."[1]

> To be a self in the presence of other selves is not a derivative experience but primordial. To be able to say that I am I is not an inference from the statement that I think thoughts nor from the statement that I have a law-acknowledging conscience. It is, rather, the acknowledgement of my existence as the counterpart of another self.[2]

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[1] HRN, "The Ego-Alter Dialectic and the Conscience," pp. 353-54.

[2] RS, p. 71.

Man as a self is a being which comes to know itself in the presence of others. The essence of the self is to live in response to other selves.

The awareness of self is not something made up of many discrete encounters with others arising out of atomic events and atomic responses. There is a context of relationship in which prevails a constancy between an "I" and a "Thou." The self lives "in responsive relations to Thou's who, on the one hand, display constancy in their actions toward the self, and on the other hand, live in constant response-relations to other Thou's and I's."[1] This context can be called the "generalized other," which provides a system of interpretation by which the self can understand past actions and anticipate future actions on it.

> I live in the presence of, and in response to, a Thou who is not an isolated event but symbolic in his particularity of something general and constant. In the other I meet not a composite other but yet something general in the particular.[2]

Niebuhr's understanding of the other is not one which makes it an impersonal activity. The self comes to know itself through other Thou's as part of a community of interaction. "The social self is never a mere I-Thou self but an I-You self, responding to a Thou that is a member of an interacting community."[3]

> So the social self exists in responses neither to atomic other beings nor to a generalized other or impartial spectator but to others who as Thou's are members of a group on whose interactions constancies are present in

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[1] Ibid., p. 77. [2] Ibid. [3] Ibid., p. 78.

> such a way that the self can interpret present and anticipate future action upon it. It can respond to the meaning of present action because such action is part of a total action, something which means the total action or derives its meaning from that whole. So my conscience represents not so much my awareness of the approvals and disapprovals of other individuals in isolation as of the ethos of my society, that is, of its mode of interpersonal interactions.[1]

Niebuhr pointed out that "the other" is not always one. There is a plurality of others: "The self does not deal with one 'generalized other' only but with many, and all its 'others' are generalized."[2] The question of polytheism versus monotheism arises when one begins to deal with these others as "courts of last resort." Niebuhr thought that polytheism was more prevalent in moral life "since the polytheistic pluralism of the moral life appears in the readiness with which the self flies from one companionship to another and changes not only the content but also the form of its conscience."[3] The conviction that there is one God behind the many and that God is one is for Niebuhr bound up with an analysis of faith and with historical revelation. Though he did not discuss in this article why faith and God go together, i.e., that to know the One and Mighty is the doing of that Mighty One and not human doing, he did indicate that monotheism is a gift: ". . . the unity of self and the unity of the other go hand in hand and it is impossible to ascribe priority to the former."[4]

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[1] Ibid., pp. 78-79.

[2] HRN, "The Ego-Alter Dialectic and the Conscience," p. 354.

[3] Ibid., p. 357.

[4] Ibid.

What is of paramount importance for understanding the place of God in Niebuhr's social theory of self is that "the self does not freely choose and freely represent the other to itself."[1] It is this feature of the social idea of self that Niebuhr highlighted in his discussion of the image of responsibility.

> It is implied--and this implication is of first importance --that our deeds as doers are not spontaneous products of a self-moving will, uncaused deeds. They presuppose an action prior to our own. This prior action is not understood with the aid of the mechanistic symbol as though our act were "caused" as by a motor external to ourselves, and therefore the invariant and necessary consequence of the other action; nor is it understood with organic analogies in mind. Our moral action presupposes an action prior to our own as an answer presupposes a question, as a reply presupposes a challenge. Let us call this category or notion the principle of alter-action.[2]

In developing the image of responsibility as the key with which to describe man's moral activity, Niebuhr showed clearly his social view of man. "What is implicit in the idea of responsibility is the image of man-the-answer, man engaged in dialogue, man acting in response to action upon him."[3] This image of response replaced "faculty psychology" and "associationist psychology" with a "psychology of interaction which has made familiar to us the idea that we act in reaction to stimuli. Biology and sociology, as well as psychology, have taught us to regard ourselves as beings in the midst of a field of natural and social forces, acted upon and reacting, attracted and repelling."[1] In this view, history is not to be understood by studying the ideals or the laws of different groups but "by inquirying into the challenges in their natural and social environment to which the societies were responding."[2]

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[1] Ibid., p. 355.

[2] Taken from the tape-script of the Second Earl Lecture given at the Pacific School of Religion, Berkeley, California, in 1961. This lecture was not published in RS.

[3] RS, p. 56.

An element in the social understanding of self which Niebuhr developed at great length is the triadic character of social existence.[3] The self does not come to awareness just in the relation to another self; both the "I" and the "Thou" are in relation to a third element. "I am social not only because I exist in direct encounter with other selves but because I live in relation to companions with whom I encounter the powers and events that act upon us."[4] The response of the self is not just to another but also responsibility for some thing or someone to which the other responds. "The self existing as I-Thou being in the presence of Thou's that so interact as to form a relatively predictable society is led to respond in that situation not only to the Thou's and to the You but to that to which Thou's and the You respond."[5]

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[1] Ibid. [2] Ibid.

[3] Niebuhr used the triadic understanding of self to develop his doctrine of faith. We will treat of this triad in greater detail in the next chapter which is devoted to an analysis of Niebuhr's doctrine of faith. See pp. 263-68, below.

[4] H. Richard Niebuhr, "On the Meaning of Responsibility," Lecture given at Cambridge University, 25 May 1960, p. 19.

[5] RS, p. 79.

The importance of the triadic understanding of self and society for Niebuhr's ethics is seen clearly when the third element in the I-Thou dialogue is God. "Responsibility is a universal feature of the social life of men, but the content of responsibility varies with the nature of the society to which men understand themselves to belong."[1] If one has made his point of total and final commitment something less than the universal and absolute, it will show up in his restricted notion of what and to whom he is responsible. But if one has God's cause as that to which he and others must respond, his ethical activity takes on a universal proportion.

> To the monotheistic believer for whom all responses to his companions are interrelated with his responses to God as the ultimate person, the ultimate cause, the center of universal community, there seem to be indications in the whole of the responsive accountable life of men of a movement of self-judgment and self-guidance which cannot come to rest until it makes its reference to a universal other and a universal community, which that other both represents and makes his cause.[2]

Niebuhr called this crucial element in his ethical approach "cathēkontic" or "the ethics of the fitting" precisely because of the place God as the universal other played in Niebuhr's theory of value.

> . . . in *cathēkontic* ethics, or the ethics of the fitting we find ourselves led to the notion of universal responsibility, that is, of a life of responses to actions which is always qualified by our interpretation of these actions as taking place in a *universe*, and by the further understanding that there will be a response to our action by

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[1] H. Richard Niebuhr, "The Responsibility of the Church Society," in *The Gospel, The Church and The World*, ed. K. S. Latourette (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1936), pp. 116-17.

[2] RS, pp. 86-87.

> representatives of universal community, or by the generalized other who is universal, or by an impartial spectator who regards our actions from a universal point of view, whose impartiality is that of loyalty to the universal cause.[1]

We need now to see more clearly the role of God in Niebuhr's value-theory. In Niebuhr's view, God is the Center of value but he is not to be equated with a specific value.

II. God as the Center of Value

Niebuhr's unquestioning adherence to a monotheistic belief in God led to his consistent and persistent rejection of any theory of God which made something relative equivalent to or the criterion of what deity is. Niebuhr's resistance to such absolutizing of the relative is especially evident in his criticism of the use of value-theory in defining God.

Yet, by criticizing theological uses of value-theories, Niebuhr did not discount the importance of value-theory for theology.[2] In fact, his criticism of several value-theories and their understanding of God is a clear instance of how Niebuhr used critical realism, on the one hand, to point out the deficiencies of liberal theology and, on the other hand, to develop a theory of God which did not claim an epistemological exemption for the experience of God that would set this experience outside the normal process of human knowing.

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[1] *Ibid*., pp. 87-88.

[2] "It is possible and necessary to interpret religion as an affair of *valuation* without assuming that such valuation must or can be made on the basis of a previously established standard of values." HRN, "Value-Theory and Theology," pp. 111-12.

The basis of Niebuhr's criticism of several uses of value-theory in theology is his understanding of the Center of value. From this understanding he developed his own relational theory of value which he constructed to compensate for the deficiencies which he found in the theological application of other theories of value.

For Niebuhr, all value is relational; and the basic relation in all value-process is the God-relation. In value-theories where the relation to God is less clearly discerned and articulated, it can be called the relation to what one considers his or her center of value.

In Niebuhr's analysis, the necessity of beginning with a center of value is a religious commitment, whether or not the person who has chosen the value-center considers this choice religious.[1] For, to choose a center of value is to make a dogmatic assertion about reality. "Though relational value theory is not psychologically relativistic it is evidently dogmatically relativistic since it is necessary to take one's standpoint with or in some being accepted as the center of value if one is to construct anything like a consistent system of value judgment and determinations of what is right."[2]

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[1] "In view of this necessity of beginning with a value-center it seems evident that every theory of value, so far as it is relational, is religious in character." H. Richard Niebuhr, "The Center of Value," p. 110.

[2] *Ibid*., p. 109. Psychological relativism is one kind of view which says that whatever the person desires or thinks is good makes it so. Dogmatic relativism, on the other hand, means the choice of a center of value in relation to which one can determine what is good. "Such relational value-theory is then

The fact that dogmatic assertion is at the basis of establishing a value-theory is not disturbing to Niebuhr. But the fact that those who make this assertion have used their theory in turn to reinterpret, or to substitute for, the religious experience is reprehensible to Niebuhr. By refusing to see the religious dimensions of the dogmatic assertion at the base of their value-theories, many value-theologians have not seen that the dogmas at the base of their value-theory are "assertions of faith, confessions of trust in something which makes life worth living, commitments of the self to a God."[1] In using their theories to reinterpret religious experience, they have not clarified the meaning of that experience but only have instanced another example of religious commitment.

> To found religion on such a basis or to criticize it by means of such a system of ethics is to found one religion upon another, or to argue in a circle, or to criticize one religion by means of another. It is not to found religion upon a wholly rational, undogmatic foundation or to criticize it by means of an impartial principle.[2]

One of the reasons why Niebuhr found the value-theologies of his time inadequate was their inability to assume a disinterested attitude in their examination of the reality of religious experience. The one thing he saw that they all had in common was that "they assume that men have a knowledge of absolutely valid values which is not only independent of their knowledge

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relativistic, not in the sense that value is relative to emotions, hence private and irrational, but in the sense in which physical science is relativistic without loss of objectivity." Ibid., p. 106.

[1] HRN, "Value-Theory and Theology," p. 106.

[2] Ibid.

of God but which is also in some way determinative of God."[1] By judging the religious experience on the basis of value-presuppositions gained prior to the religious experience, they had already assumed an interested position toward the reality of religious experience.

Part of the reason for Niebuhr's taking up the epistemological position of critical realism was to counteract "interested" approaches to theology and the reality of God. Only through a disinterested approach to the religious reality can theology hope to claim for itself the title of being scientific.[2]

> Now religion itself makes the same demand for disinterestedness in the observation and description of divine activity or reality that natural science makes in the case of its objects. In neither case is this disinterestedness an uninterestedness. On the contrary, disinterestedness is possible in science, as in religion, only when the object excites interest for its own sake and not for the sake of any end external to it. Religion demands that God be loved for his own sake rather than for the sake of any value, high or low, material or spiritual, which he is conceived to conserve, promote or increase.[3]

Niebuhr recognized that, in the study of religious reality as in the study of nature, there is a convictional base which indeed represents an interested approach. But the difference between this kind of conviction and the convictions of a particular value-theory is that the former is an affirmation of the existence of the reality which is to be studied as separate from the knower and yet in relation to the human knowing subject. This affirmation does not, however, attempt to press that reality into a preconceived mold as would the "interests" of a particular value-theory.[1] As we have seen, Niebuhr's affirmation of God's existence and the human relation to him is grounded in an epistemological realism.

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[1] Ibid., p. 95.

[2] "It has been recognized in the first place—most of all by the American realists—that theology cannot prosper as a science so long as it refuses to accept the disinterested method of all other sciences." Ibid., p. 97.

[3] Ibid., p. 102.

It is from the base of critical realism, therefore, that Niebuhr called into question those value-theories which subject the religious reality to scrutiny in the name of some value known prior to the religious experience. Because the proponents of these value-theologies have not seen the dogmatic assertions in their criterion of religious reality, they have remained unaware of their own religious commitment. They are the ones who have remained uncritically dogmatic.

> Uncritical dogmatism is the practice of those explicit or disguised relational systems of thought about the good which arbitrarily choose some limited starting point for their inquiries and either end with the confession that value is an irrational concept which must nevertheless be rationally employed because nature requires this, or otherwise rule out of consideration great realms of value relations as irrelevant. Critical thought based on theocentric faith has no quarrel with the method of objective relativism in value theory and ethics. It objects only but strongly to the religious foundations of these relativisms.[2]

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[1] "Questions about value certainly remain in the empirical sciences, but the values which are studied are not those of the observer so much as those of the observed. The reference of value relations is sought in the entity observed and not in some external purpose or being," Ibid., p. 97. Niebuhr wanted the same kind of disinterestedness in the science of theology. "The enduring contribution of empirical theology, from Schleiemacher to Macintosh, lies in its insistence on the fact that knowledge of God is available only in religious relation to Him." Ibid., p. 112.

[2] HRN, "Center of Value," p. 113.

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Niebuhr's solution to the arbitrariness that he saw in the use of certain value-theories in theology was a relational value-theory which left God as the Center of value. Niebuhr never discounted the contributions which both European empirical theology represented by Schleiermacher and Ritschl and American empirical theology represented by Macintosh had made to theology.[1] They had shown that the uniqueness of religious knowledge lay in the fact that it was a type of value-knowledge.[2] Niebuhr's modification of their interpretation of religious valuation was to make clear the position of God as the Center of value.

In a relational theory of value, value is neither to be equated with an external object somehow intuited or known outside the relationship of the knower to an object nor is it to be equated with a subjective attitude of the knower which is placed on the object by the knower. What the relational value-theory attempts is an interpretation of valuation which recognizes the relativity of values without prejudice to their objectivity. Relational value theory is "objective in the sense that value relations are understood to be independent of the feelings of an observer but not in the sense that value is itself an objective kind of reality."[1] In other words, the objectivity of value is not an independent essence or an abstract idea but rather is what arises in the relationship between two beings.

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[1] HRN, "Value-Theory and Theology," p. 98 and p. 112. See also MR, pp.16-27.

[2] "Religious knowledge has been shown to be unique, and this uniqueness has been shown to be due to the fact that it is a type of value-knowledge or valuation--as, indeed, all knowledge probably is. The knowledge of God, it has been pointed out, is not equivalent to the knowledge of doctrine or of a First Cause or a Designer. And its dissimilarity to theological or metaphysical knowledge is due not only to its immediacy--which may be questioned--but to its character as knowledge of a being having value of a certain sort. Empirical theology has seen that religion is an affair of valuation, analogous to morality and art." HRN, "Value-Theory and Theology,"p. 112.

Niebuhr called this kind of relational objectivity "objective relativism." The fundamental observation of objective relativism is "that value is present wherever one existent being with capacities and potentialities confronts another existence that limits or completes or complements it."[2] Just as value is not an independent existent, so also it is not a particular relation. Rather it is what happens in the relationship of being to being.[3]

Value is co-existive with being, but only when being is in relation to being. It is not found in a being in isolation from other beings.

> Relational value theory understands that being and value are inseparably connected but that value cannot be identified with a certain mode of being or any being considered in isolation, whether it be ideal or actual. Value is present wherever being confronts being, wherever there is becoming in the midst of plural, interdependent, and interacting existences. It is not a function of being as such but of being in relation to being. It is therefore universal, co-extensive with the realm of being, and yet not identifiable with any being, even universal being. For if any-

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[1] HRN, "Center of Value," p. 102. [2] _Ibid_., p. 103.

[3] "Value is the good-for-ness of being for being in their reciprocity, their animosity, and their mutual aid. Value cannot be defined or intuited in itself for it has no existence in itself; and nothing is valuable in itself, but everything has value, positive or negative, in its relations. This value is not a relation but arises in the relations of being to being." _Ibid_., p. 107.

> thing existed simply in itself and by itself, value would not be present.[1]

God as the Center of value is therefore not to be equated with any value. But he is the Being in relation to which all other being has value.

The value of deity then arises in the relation of all being--animate and inanimate, intelligent and bestial--to God who is the Center of value. In the instance of human beings the value of deity is independent of human desire for God or consciousness of the need for a Center of value, but it is not independent of the structure of human personhood and its actual needs. "It may be stated negatively by saying that, while the Being men call God exists independently of the creatures constituted to need him, it is not possible to define his Deity without reference to his relation to his creatures."[2]

God as the Center of value is the primordial relation for he is the absolute source of value in relation to whom all other things have value. Instead of defining God by reference to a particular human value or need, Niebuhr defined God as the source of all value. The dogmatic foundation of his relational value-theory begins "with the transcendent One for whom alone there is an ultimate good and for whom, as the source and end of all things, whatever is, is good."[3] The value of deity for mankind is bound up with the human recognition of the final source of being and value; it is bound up with choosing one's center of value.

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[1] *Ibid*.

[2] HRN, "Value-Theory and Theology," p. 113.

[3] HRN, "The Center of Value," p. 112.

> The religious need is the need for that which makes life worth living, which bestows meaning on life by revealing itself as the final source of life's being and value. The religious need is satisfied only in so far as man is able to recognize himself as valued by something beyond himself. That has the value of deity for man which values him. The valuation of which man becomes aware in religious experience is not, first of all, his evaluation of a being, but that being's evaluation of him.[1]

Niebuhr considered his relational theory of value not only compatible with the monotheistic faith of traditional Christianity and Judaism but also a statement of the concern of that faith that nothing relative be made absolute.[2] In terms of value analysis the belief in God as the absolute source of being and value results in the relativity of all other being and theories of value. "A monotheistically centered value-theory is not only compatible with such objective relativism in value analysis but requires it in view of its fundamental dogma that none is absolute save God and that the absolutizing of anything finite is ruinous to the finite self."[3]

Quite clearly in Niebuhr's thought the affirmation of a radical monotheistic doctrine of God provides for the relativity of all value-systems. In a relational value-theory a person is made aware that value is a changing dynamic, that it is found in the process of a being becoming itself in relation to others. An added awareness to the becomingness of existence is the awareness of the great multi-dimensionality of value, "for the existent being which is becoming what it is potentially and which meets such complementary good in its environment, is itself good-for the other beings (if not bad-for them) and it forms a part of larger complexes of being, as when men live in society, or animals participate in the evolutionary process of life."[1] The changing dynamic of a being becoming itself and the great multi-dimensionality of value depends on what one chooses as his or her center of value. If one chooses less than the absolute who is the source of all being and power, that person has arbitrarily stopped the flow of being becoming itself and has substituted his or her view for the multi-dimensional view.

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[1] HRN, "Value-Theory and Theology," p. 115.

[2] HRN, "The Center of Value," p. 111.

[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 112-13.

For Niebuhr, the greatest evil in a relational theory of value is to make something finite the absolute in terms of which all else is judged. He singled out two kinds of absoluting the relative, viz., that of humanism and vitalism, and compared them to radical monotheism. He opted for monotheism for "it has the great advantage over humanism and vitalism that it does not offer an evident abstraction of one sort of finite being from the rest of existence with the consequent appearance of arbitrariness in the selection of finite centers of value that from any disinterested point of view have no greater claim to centrality than any others."[1]

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 106.

The choice which one makes for his or her center of value, is a choice of one's God. It is a religious choice, or as Niebuhr would have it, an act of faith. In the next chapter we will see how Niebuhr treated the subject of faith as part of the way one chooses his or her center of value.

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[1] *Ibid*., p. 112.

CHAPTER SIX

NIEBUHR'S DOCTRINE OF FAITH

Like a stage-setting for a play, the question of faith has been in the background of the preceding two chapters. Against that background the meaning of Niebuhr's theory of relationality and the meaning of Niebuhr's theory of value have been played out. In this chapter we want to bring Niebuhr's doctrine of faith to the foreground and to let it assume the role of the protagonist.

The fiduciary quality of human existence is for Niebuhr part of the process whereby a person comes to know selfhood. In other words, faith is an integral part of the epistemological process in human beings. Inherent in the fiduciary character of how humans come to know is the question of God, for faith and God go together.

On this latter point, Niebuhr was quite insistent. Whether or not a person explicitly recognizes his or her religious assumptions, whatever is the center of that person's reliance and trust is God for that person. As a way of underlining this point, Niebuhr often quoted Martin Luther's answer to the question, "What does it mean to have a god, or what is God?" Luther's response was, "Trust and faith of the heart alone make both God and idol. . . . For the two, faith and God, hold close together. Whatever thy heart clings to . . . and relies upon, that is properly thy God."[1]

Niebuhr's doctrine of God and his epistemological stance come together in a most emphatic way in his doctrine of faith. Faith is part of epistemology, and a critical faith is the ability to discern what truly has the value of deity. For Niebuhr the question about the existence or non-existence of gods was a false question.

> The true query of religion is, "Which among the available realities has the value of deity or has the potency of deity?" And this question turns into the other query, "Which reality has those characteristics which are the foundation of the value of deity, or which fulfill the human need for God."[2]

In this chapter we will first see how faith is part of epistemology. We will then see how true faith is the ability to discern what, in fact, has the value of deity. The key to understanding Niebuhr's doctrine of God is that Niebuhr's primary question was not metaphysical but epistemological. "Our first question is 'How is faith in God possible?' In other words, the problem of God arises for us in its subjective rather than objective, or, better, in personal rather than impersonal terms."[3] How the personal as part of faith is intimately bound up with epistemology is the subject matter of the next section.

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[1] Quoted in HRN, "Faith in Gods and in God," p. 119. Other places in Niebuhr's writings where he used the Luther quote are: MR, p. 17; H. Richard Niebuhr, "Chapter 8: Martin Luther," Christian Ethics: Sources of the Living Tradition, p. 245.

[2] HRN, "Value-Theory and Theology," p. 114.

[3] HRN, "Faith in Gods and in God, p. 116.

I. Faith as an Epistemological Activity

We have already seen how the God-relation is primordial for the defining of a human being as a self;[1] and we have seen how Niebuhr developed the personal nature of humanity along the lines of sociality.[2] In this section we will see more explicitly that faith as part of the epistemological process is at the root both of Niebuhr's understanding of the God-relation and of his understanding of the relational structure of the human self. To do this, we have divided this section into two parts: (1) The relation of faith to critical realism; and (2) the triadic structure of knowing as faith.

In addition to consulting the published works of Niebuhr on faith, we have also drawn from two book-length manuscripts of Niebuhr, the earlier one entitled, "Knowledge of Faith," and the later one entitled, "Faith on Earth."[3] A description of the latter, with sizable quotations, can be found in James Fowler's *To See the Kingdom*.[4]

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[1] See pp. 205-214, above.

[2] See pp. 230-242, above.

[3] H. Richard Niebuhr, "Knowledge of Faith," (manuscript of four chapters, written in 1946-47) abbreviated hereafter as KF; H. Richard Niebuhr, "Faith on Earth," (manuscript of seven chapters, written over period from 1952 to 1958) abbreviated hereafter as FE. See bibliography for fuller description.

[4] "Chapter V: Faith on Earth," pp. 201-245. Fowler notes the fact that Niebuhr at one time planned to publish "Faith on Earth" along with most of what has been published in *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture;* publisher's exhortation to rewrite prevented this. See Fowler, pp. 203-204.

A. Critical Realism and Faith

The word "faith" in Christian circles often has the connotation of belief in creedal statements. If faith, however, were only a matter of assent to propositions, there would be very little grist in such a propositional understanding of faith for an epistemological analysis to yield much in the way of clearer or deeper understanding of the human knowing process. Of propositional faith an epistemologist could only say that it is the human ability to give subjective assent to the certitude of what is stated without objective evidence for the certitude.

Niebuhr perceived the limitations, for deeper epistemological analysis of the faith-process, of an understanding of faith which defined it solely as an assent to a creedal formulation.[1] He recognized that the degree of certitude one places in a statement is part of the faith-process, but he also recognized that there is another part of the faith-process which cannot be described as assent to a truth but rather as the "attitude and action of confidence in, and fidelity to, certain realities as the sources of value and the objects of loyalty."[2]

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[1] In FE, "Chapter III: Believing and Knowing in Community," Niebuhr noted the inadequacy of a propositional notion of faith for an epistemological understanding of faith. Here he addressed himself to the thought of Kant and A. E. Taylor, who defined faith as conviction of subjective certitude for a statement for which there is no objective certitude. Niebuhr's judgment is: "Feelings of assurance or conviction are doubtless present in us as we hold statements to be true, but inquiry into the nature or degrees of these feelings seems likely to involve us in solipsistic inquiries and in the making of arbitrary definitions that do not lead beyond themselves. That activity called believing which is a trusting in another person offers a more fruitful prospect of inquiry" (p. 42).

[2] RMWC, p. 16.

Niebuhr called faith as assent to truth "fides"; he called faith as trust and loyalty "fiducia" and "fidelitas."

> I believe a statement; but I believe the statement because I, as a self, trust in another's loyalty. And the Latin helps us here; for belief it has the word fides, for trust it has the word fiducia, and for loyalty it has the word fidelitas. Fides, fiducia, and fidelitas,--these belong together; where there is no fiducia, no trust, there can be no believing, and there can be no trusting where there is no loyalty; no faithfulness.[1]

Though Niebuhr did not discount a fides approach, he did dissent from those who made this the only understanding of faith. As he stated it, "Perhaps it is this concentration on faith as trust and loyalty which has led me farther away from the road that many other postliberals--particularly Karl Barth --have taken. So many of them seem to me to have gone back to orthodoxy as right teaching, right doctrine, and to faith as fides, as assent; . . . toward the assertion of the primacy of ideas over personal relations."[2] Niebuhr saw in the activity of human trust and loyalty a way to elaborate the epistemology of the faith process, a way which the epistemological understanding of faith as assent to truth did not afford.

Niebuhr saw how Kant and Taylor distinguished faith, as assent to truth, from knowledge of truth on the basis of directness and indirectness of the knowing subject to the object of knowledge. In the case of faith, the knowledge of the object is indirect whereas in the case of knowledge, as defined by

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[1] HRN, "The Triad of Faith," Andover Newton Bulletin 47 (1954): 6.

[2] HRN, "Reformation: Continuing Imperative," p. 250.

Kant and Taylor, the knowledge of the object is direct.[1] What Niebuhr found wanting in this approach to faith is that there is no place for the faith-process in such an epistemology. It leaves the faith-process outside the ordinary ways that humans know.

Though Niebuhr accepted the fact that part of the faith-process (faith as _fides_) is accepting as true that to which we have no direct relation, he also saw that there was a type of direct knowledge involved in the faith-process which he understood as _fiducia_ and _fidelitas_. This knowledge is a special kind of knowledge, viz., the awareness of another person. It is the acknowledgment of another self.

> It is knowing in the sense of being a direct relation, not a believing in the sense of being a knowledge about, gained from an authority or a companion. To be sure, if by knowing we mean analytical understanding of that which we encounter directly, then indeed, this is not knowing. But if we mean by knowing directness of apprehension or 'vision' it is a knowing. In order that a distinction may be made we may give to the knowledge present in believing the name _acknowledgment_. What is so acknowledged in our believing is the person.[2]

Though the knowledge of the person is direct, it is not a knowledge of the person as an object. The first awareness that acknowledgment of another self brings is recognition of another knower. "When I believe the scientist as he makes statements about the structure of the atom, I acknowledge the presence of a perceiver and thinker, of a knower who is not my object but who as subject has a relation to an object."[1] There is a common object to which we are both related, and in that relationship we come to know each other. In all knowing there is the triad, at the very least, of a common object and two subjects.

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[1] FE, "Chapter III: Believing and Knowing in Community," pp. 42-44.

[2] _Ibid._, p. 51. See also KF, "Chapter II: Towards Understanding Understanding," pp. 8-9.

Another awareness which acknowledgment of person brings is the recognition of others as moral beings. "Believing the statement of another is an act of trusting a self, of acknowledging the presence of a being who not only knows and as such can be in error, but of one who is bound by promises and as such can betray me, can tell a lie, or can speak truth, can keep faith with me."[2] Acknowledgment of another is awareness of that person as a covenanting being, for when one believes another there is implicit or explicit the awareness that the other is obligated to a cause and to others, is bound not to deceive but to be faithful in telling the truth he or she knows.

> Selves are social knowers who live in covenant relations. Such beings are known or acknowledged in our believing. Believing and the knowledge of beings of this sort belong together. Outside of faith there is no knowledge of selves. In believing we not only act as selves but also acknowledge the presence of other selves.[3]

The importance of this special kind of knowledge which comes with acknowledgment of another person for the more general epistemological analysis of knowledge as direct relation to an object, as in perception or in conceptualization, is that it underlines the social character of all knowledge.[1] The unique element in Niebuhr's epistemological position called critical realism is that it is built up explicitly on this social character. As Niebuhr saw it, there can be no knowledge of an objective reality existing separately from the knower without the acknowledgment of another person.

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[1] FE, "Chapter III: Believing and Knowing in Community," p. 51.

[2] Ibid., p. 52. [3] Ibid., p. 54.

> In the actual human situation a believing enters into all our knowing and a knowing into all our believing. Believing and knowing, being certain and uncertain, trusting and having vision of true relations, these are events that occur only in interpersonal society. There are no mind-object or I-It relations that can be intelligibly abstracted from mind-mind and I-Thou relations, nor do there seem to be any interpersonal or inter-mental relations that can be understood without reference to common objects.[2]

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[1] Niebuhr understood that the knowledge which comes from acknowledging another person is different from the knowledge that comes from perception and conceptualization. At one point he called his analysis of this special knowledge "pistology" to set it off from what are more traditional epistemological concerns. "Two sets of hazards in particular always seem to threaten the study of the epistemology of faith which might better be named pistology, since it seeks knowledge not so much of our episteme, our knowledge, as of our pistis, our faith," FE, "Chapter II: The Method of Reflection," p. 29. It is quite evident, however, that Niebuhr understood his analysis of the social character of faith to be a unique contribution to the whole epistemological question. His concern was to keep the knowledge which comes with faith distinct from other kinds of knowledge but not separate from them. "On the one hand inquirers have been tempted by the close relation between faith, thinking, feeling and valuing to identify the first with one of the others and its object with the objective counterpart of reason, feeling or valuation. On the other hand the effort to distinguish between faith and these other activities of the subject has led at times to such a separation of believing from them that the unity of the self has been lost to view, faith has been interpreted as a miraculous, intrusive power and the God of faith has been isolated from every reality or aspect of reality encountered by the perceiving and conceiving, feeling and valuing subject." Ibid., p. 34.

[2] FE, "Chapter III: Believing and Knowing in Community," p. 45.

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In Niebuhr's analysis the social quality of knowledge shows up both in perception and conceptualization. He gave the example of the writer and his paper and pen to demonstrate the social character of perception. The writer can say, "I know this paper, I perceive these letters; I know that this paper is white and not black." If the writer thinks that he is alone with his objects and his apprehension of them does not require any mediation, Niebuhr would contend that the writer has forgotten that in the very act of reflecting on this object as "paper" and these objects as "letters" he is considering the questions of co-knowers. To call an object "paper" means that there are others who know it as such or will question my choice of it as such. Without others I would not know my immediate perception as knowledge. As Niebuhr stated it, "Would there be any reflection, would there be anything but brute immediacy, without even the knowledge that it is immediacy, had there not been these co-knowers and co-inquirers into knowledge in my past and were there not co-knowers in my future whose questions and reflections I anticipate?"[1]

To show the social character of conceptualization, Niebuhr used the example of language. Words have a double reference. On the one hand, they refer to objects and direct attention to them; on the other hand, they are directed to persons "as the words and concepts in the minds of my fellow-knowers by means of which they will be directed to the same objects."[2]

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 46.

[2] *Ibid.*

Niebuhr cited the work of a linguist to show how the social context can vary the meaning of an objective reality.[1] For example, the tendency in English when speaking of the cosmos is to segment it up into discreet units such as "sky," "hill," "swamp"; whereas in the Hopi language nature is seen more as a flow, and not as distinct, separate things, so that a hill is seen as ground in motion. Other examples of varying social context and use of language can be found in the way a mathematician views reality with the aid of his highly technical language over against the way a dramatist or poet views reality with his use of language. Niebuhr's conclusion is:

> The world known through the mediation of the one language [mathematics] is not more directly encountered than the world known through the other [poetry]; the precise objects and precise relations of which we have 'vision' are not more objective than the boundless passions, aspirations and emotions of men that the other set of symbols and concepts enables us to identify. Knowing and believing, subject and fellow-subject, are present in each set of subjective encounters with objective realities.[2]

Niebuhr did not think that the social character of language and concepts warrants a radical skepticism which would say whatever is, is because thinking or speaking makes it so. There is an objective reality to which we are related as co-knowers. The social quality of language does mean "that an element of believing, of acceptance of the reports of our companions, of the tradition of our society about encounters with nature, enters into all our knowing at the very beginning."[1]

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[1] The work cited is: Benjamin Lee Whorf, "Language and Logic," *Technology Review* 43, no. 6 (April 1941), reprinted in Laura Thompson, *Culture in Crisis* (1950), pp. 153-54.

[2] FE, "Chapter III: Believing and Knowing in Community," p. 48b.

Niebuhr considered the natural sciences and the historical sciences as great exemplifications of this social character of knowledge. Only in a community of knowers who are trusted in their analyses of reality and are held responsible for their knowledge to other knowers is science furthered. This process of trust and mistrust is seen in the way that the knowledge of an individual scientist is verified. "Verification requires not only that the same subject shall find the same consequences in an experiment or in an encounter with the same objective order in repeated instances, but that other subjects find similar or identical results in similar encounters and that these other subjects be trustworthy."[2]

The same kind of social character takes place in the experience of reality other than the reality experienced by natural science. In particular, this social character is present in the experience of God. Niebuhr called this social knowledge of God the triadic structure of faith.

B. Triadic Structure of Faith

Niebuhr did not consider the social structure of knowledge, which is part of all human knowledge, as an analogy or symbol of religious faith which is the subjective counterpart of the objective reality known as God. Religious faith is itself a special instance of the social character of knowledge. It is the unnamed assumption involved in the sociality of knowing.

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 49.

[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50.

> Something is being assumed which must be acknowledged and brought into the agreement between the communicators, namely, the presence in our common life of a believing and trusting that is more than a believing and trusting and acknowledging one another. It is being assumed that this inquiry is being conducted in a company of 'believers' who are not only in relations of trust and distrust to one another but in relations of trust and distrust to something beyond both, and who are aware of this fact and seek to understand this relation better. Hence we proceed on the basis of the agreement that we are not trying to persuade one another to believe in God, but rather to understand how it is that we believe and what knowledge there is in this believing. In this situation we are more or less consciously aware of the fact that our believing and disbelieving of each other is not only a parable of our believing and disbelieving God but intimately connected with it.[1]

Niebuhr lifted out the triadic structure of self, co-knower, and object which he found present in all human knowing in order to penetrate more deeply the meaning of religious faith. We have seen how this triad is present in his principle of relationality as a type of theological anthropology, viz., God, self, and the neighbor.[2] We have also seen how this triad is present in his theological ethics, viz., God, the self, and being.[3] We want now to make more explicit this triadic structure of religious faith.

The first element of the social character of knowledge which Niebuhr stressed for understanding the triad of faith is that in all acknowledging of another person there is a third element. In the recognition of a "Thou" by an "I" there is always present this third element which for the present we can call an "It." We make up a community of knowers who can communicate with each other not just because we are present to each other but also because we have a common co-presence to a third reality.

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[1] FE, "Chapter IV: The Structure of Faith," pp. 1-2.

[2] See p. 207, above.

[3] See pp. 239-42, above.

> _I_, _Thou_ and _It_, form a triad in such a way that all knowl- of the _It_ depends on a self's relation to other selves; an _I_ has no direct knowledge of the _It_ without using the contributions of other selves who also have a direct relation to _It_. Nor does the _I_ seem to have any direct relation to a _Thou_ without reference to its relation to an object. I know you or acknowledge you in my act of believing your statements about a common third.[1]

The second element which Niebuhr stressed in the acknowledgment of another as a co-knower is that the self also recognizes the other as a moral person. The "I" responds to the "Thou" as to another who has the ability to be faithful or unfaithful to the promises he or she has made. The fidelity-infidelity of the other is the cause which motivates my trust or distrust for that person. "Trust is a response to and an acknowledgment of fidelity. The two are so interrelated in the reciprocal action of selves that one cannot speak of faith simply as the trust which appears but must speak of it also as the fidelity to which trust is the response."[2]

Involved in the notion of fidelity is a refinement of the meaning of the third element in the faith-relation, a refinement which Niebuhr called "the cause."[1] When the mature self recognizes the other as faithful, the "I" sees that it also has the responsibility to be faithful to the other.[2] This faithfulness in the self is not just fidelity to another's faithfulness but also the mutual fidelity of both the self and the other to a third element, viz., "the cause."

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[1] FE, "Chapter IV: The Structure of Faith," pp. 5-6.

[2] _Ibid_., p. 6.

> Here, then, are two strands of faith, loyalty, and trust. These stand in responsive relations. I trust the loyal other and am loyal to the trustworthy other. But it has still another characteristic. To act in faith means also to act in loyalty to all who are loyal to the same cause to which I am loyal and to which the cause is loyal. . . . Faith is a dual bond of loyalty and trust that is woven around the members of such a community. It does not issue from a subject simply; it is called forth as trust by acts of loyalty on the part of others; it is infused as loyalty to a cause by others who are loyal to that cause and to me. Faith exists only in a community of selves in the presence of selves in the presence of a transcendent cause.[3]

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[1] Niebuhr often acknowledged his indebtedness to Josiah Royce for concept of faith as loyalty to a cause. He referred specifically to three of Royce's works: *The Philosophy of Loyalty* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1908); *The Sources of Religious Insight* (New York: C. Scribners & Sons, 1912); *The Problem of Christianity* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1913). See CC, p. 253; RMWC, pp. 21-22; and RS, pp. 83-84.

[2] The sign of maturity is fidelity; the sign of immaturity is to expect fidelity from others but not of oneself. "It is the immaturity of man in the presence of the Transcendent who makes God the object of his trust and distrust while he evades the question of his own fidelity to God. It is immaturity because it is the attitude of the child who has learned to acknowledge personality in the other without coming to recognition of himself as person, bound by promises and committed to the service of the other. Of course, more than immaturity is involved in most of these instances, for what is present is the effort to continue in the situation of childhood after in fact the privileges of maturity, the privilege of a freedom that has bound itself, have been claimed. Trust by the self in the other's faithfulness has as its necessary counterpart faithfulness in the self as that in which the other can in turn trust," FE, "Chapter IV: The Structure of Faith," p. 9.

[3] CC, p. 253.

Niebuhr gave several instances of a community of selves bound to a cause, such as the triad of student, teacher, and the cause of truth, or the triad of citizen, nation, and the cause of justice. The triad that interests us the most is the triad of the self, the universal community of humanity, and God.

This triad best exemplifies one final feature which Niebuhr saw in the member of the triad known as the cause. The cause is not only something to which the self and the other are found by their oath of loyalty, but it in turn also makes a claim on the community of believers. "There is a certain reciprocity here between the loyal selves and the cause; the movement of loyalty is not entirely from self to cause; there is a movement from cause to self, a movement which has something of the nature of a claim or demand."[1]

By making a claim on the community of believers, the cause also becomes an object of trust. It makes this bid for trust as well as loyalty because in a mature community of belief there is the awareness that the object of loyalty is not to be equated with that community. "This third element cannot be simply identified with the community of the loyal, since this community always has an object beyond itself for the sake of which it exists."[2] The cause transcends the community of selves.

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[1] FE, "Chapter IV: The Structure of Faith," p. 21.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 22.

The triad of self, the universal community of humanity, and God best exemplifies the feature of the cause as that which lays claim on us for trust and confidence because God as the cause raises the question of transcendence as no other cause can do. As the Center of value God is the cause beyond all causes. By introducing God into the triadic structure of faith, we have raised the question of how does one discern what has the value of deity. This question is the topic of the next section.

II. Faith as the Ability to Discern the Value of Deity

The unique contribution which Niebuhr's epistemology of faith gives to the Christian understanding of faith is that it does not separate religious belief from the structures of ordinary knowing-processes. "The structures of faith which we find in our world are not only shadows and images of divine things but participate in the ultimate structure."[1] By arguing for the identity of the faith-structure in human knowing, Niebuhr however did not think that he had crossed over from an epistemological analysis into the realm of metaphysics, e.g., that in the triad of self, the universal community of humanity and ultimate cause he had thereby offered a "pistological argument" for the existence of God.[2]

Knowledge of the existence of God and knowledge of who or what God is are for Niebuhr matters which he confessed to as a Christian.[1] Faith in God for him was not an inference; it had not come about in moving from the known to the unknown. Niebuhr's epistemological analysis of the faith-structure, common to all men, was not done separate from his own actual faith-relation to God which he had as part of the Christian community of belief. "Hence though our order of inquiry calls for an analysis of faith that begins with its presence among men in their personal interrelations it does not or ought not pretend to be an order of inference or to be regarded as an effort to persuade those to acknowledge God in faith who do not do so."[2]

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[1] Ibid., p. 23.

[2] FE, "Chapter V: Broken Faith," pp. 1-2.

Though Niebuhr did not consider himself to be a philosopher speculating on God, he did see his analysis of faith to be the work of an epistemologist. He used his analysis of the general structure of faith as interpersonal to deepen his understanding of his Christian belief. He considered his analysis to be a fides quaerens intellectum.[3]

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[1] "But it must be said, that we could not say these things about human relations, about human selves and the faith in which they live, though in the distorted forms of unfaith, if in the back of our minds there were not the image and the memory and the faith in the faithfulness of God knowing and through the faith of Jesus Christ." H. Richard Niebuhr, "The Nature of Faith: Lecture II: The Triple Bond," unpublished lecture given at Lancaster, Penn., as part of Swander Lectures, 13-15 November 1950, p. 13.

[2] FE, "Chapter IV: The Structure of Faith," p. 4.

[3] In KF, Niebuhr devoted the whole first chapter, "Faith Seeks Understanding," to demonstrating the need to seek understanding. Here he reviewed objections to such a search and defended the need for a critical attitude toward our belief. "Believing man must seek to become an understanding man because in all his action he is subject to great errors and the understanding is the critical exercise of his powers to distinguish between true and false relations to his world." Ibid., p. 20.

In the light of his confessional belief in God, Niebuhr saw that his epistemological analysis pointed up the fact that the presence of belief in the one God in all mankind is first of all a negative awareness. "Faith in God is the accompaniment of our existence as selves but first of all it is a dark background; it is present negatively as distrust and fear and hostility."[1]

The negative force of unbelief is not an absence of faith but rather a positive kind of antithesis to faith. Unbelief is not a zero-quality; rather it has a minus-valence.

> The polar opposite of virtue is vice and of faith it is faithlessness, including in that term the actions of distrusting and being disloyal as well as disbelieving. The term faithlessness as it is used in Scriptures, by Jews and Christians and by the larger culture which their thought has [sic] influences, means something positively negative, not a mere negation but negation in action.[2]

Unbelief has this positive kind of negativity because it is inter-personal; it carries with it the same triadic structure which faith has.

As we have seen in the triadic structure of faith, the self and its companions come to know the cause. When we pursue the multiformity of our causes to that in terms of which we judge all our causes, viz., to the cause beyond all causes, to our center of value, we come to an awareness of that last reality on which the self and its companions depend. As Niebuhr would have it, this awareness is not so much to be aware of absolute dependence as Schleiermacher put it; it is to be aware of the absolute on which the self and its companions depend.

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[1] FE, "Chapter V: Broken Faith," p. 2.

[2] KF, "Chapter III: Faith as a Relation Between Selves," p. 13.

> This Transcendent reality, this last fact, this Unconditioned, is no thing among things; it is no visible or conceptual reality. It is the inescapable, the radical source of self-existence, of the being of selves in time and place among other selves. Our existence as selves in this place and time comes home to us as the inexplicable event.[1]

In face of this inexplicable event we come to know the unfreeness of our freedom. We come to know the limits of our freedom, the conditions within which we as selves function. The two limits which make us most aware of the last reality are those of birth and death. "We are in the grip of power that neither asks our consent before it brings us into existence nor asks our agreement to continue us in being beyond our physical death."[2]

From his confessional belief in one God, Niebuhr saw in this awareness of our unfree freedom as selves existing within limits a type of "natural" religion. His theodicy however is not a metaphysical one, viz., a demonstration of God's existence or deductions about God's nature; his theodicy, for lack of a better term, can be called an epistemological theodicy.

> Our "natural" religion is not one of wonder about the source of natural things, whatever be the natural religion of primitive tribes. Our natural religion is inseparable from our existence as selves among selves. Here in the encounter of the "I" with that mystery of power which has thrown it into existence and confronted it with these other

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[1] FE, "Chapter V: Broken Faith," p. 3.

[2] Ibid.

> selves; here in the presence of the wonder appearing in the question of the child and the aged, "Why am I here?" the awareness of the ultimate fact dawns upon us. There is a power or a structure or a form of reality here which cannot be changed.[1]

Our ordinary attitude to this last power, our natural faith response, according to Niebuhr, is one of disappointment, of distrust, and of disbelief.

Niebuhr used his analysis of distrust as the natural faith-response of men to God to elaborate his view of sin, in particular, original sin. Original sin for him means the universal mistrust of the last reality, a mistrust found among all men whether they are Christian or not. The first element which Niebuhr drew out of his understanding of sin as mistrust and disloyalty is that the original state of mankind was not one of unbelief. There was, first of all, a state of original innocence and justice.

> If faith is a dimension of personal existence then it seems clear that distrust or disloyalty cannot be the first fact. Distrust is only possible where the conditions for trust have first been established. One cannot suspect another of lying and deceiving except in a situation where loyalty is expected. A promise must be made before it can be broken. The negative relations of distrust, disloyalty and disbelief all presuppose the previous establishment of trust, loyalty belieffulness.[2]

Another inference which Niebuhr drew from his understanding of sin as mistrust and disloyalty is that the structure of sinfulness is also triadic. "Here disloyalty and distrust, self and neighbor, are so involved that the distrust of God is a response to the companion's deception or disloyalty and the self's disloyalty in the breaking of its promise is a source of its distrust."[1] Though personal, sin is not individual; it is interpersonal. "In the history of our faithlessness every man is his own Adam but no Adam is alone in his sinfulness; none falls in solitude. His solitude is a consequence of fallenness, not the cause of it."[2]

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 18

From this state of fallenness results idolatry, for as we have seen, mistrust and disloyalty as the negative counterpart of faith have a positive force. They are commitments of the self to something less than the absolute.

> The religious concept of sin always involves the idea of disloyalty, not of disloyalty in general, but of disloyalty to the true God, to the only trustworthy and wholly lovable reality. Sin is the failure to worship God as God. Yet it is more than the absence of loyalty to God. It is not possible for men to be simply disloyal; they are always loyal to something. Disloyalty implies a false loyalty and disloyalty to God always includes loyalty to something that is not God but which claims deity.[3]

Sin then is grounded in false worship, viz., making something less than the God of monotheistic faith the center of our value and cause to which we commit ourselves unreservedly.

In the light of his epistemological analysis of faith, we can now begin to comprehend more fully Niebuhr's use of the traditional Christian understanding of God's sovereignty. The incisiveness of his analysis of the interpersonal structure of faith as common to all men centers around the greater clarity which it brings to the monotheistic understanding of God found in the Judaeo-Christian tradition. The lucidity of his examination of religious faith in terms of an experiential context common to all persons can be seen in how he related faith as trust in, and fidelity to, the one God to the polytheistic, or henotheistic, tendencies in human faith.

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[1] _Ibid_., p. 19. [2] _Ibid_.

[3] H. Richard Niebuhr, "Man the Sinner," _The Journal of Religion_ 15 (1935): 276-77.

For Niebuhr, part of the way in which we come to know the true God is by discerning what our idols are. For, if we learn to see what are the objects of misplaced trust and loyalty, we can come to know how to place our trust and loyalty in the true God. By understanding mistrust and disloyalty, we learn how to mend the broken structure of the human ability to be trustful and trustworthy.

The inadequacy of our idols often goes unnoticed until in times of crises, such as war, we come to recognize the relativity of our value-systems. We are then confronted with the twilight of the gods. We are then forced with the question: What is it that dooms our human faith to frustration?

> We may call it the nature of things, we may call it fate, we may call it reality. But by whatever name we call it, this law of things, this reality, this way things are, is something with which we all must reckon. We may not be able to give a name to it, calling it only the "void" out of which everything comes and to which everything returns, though that is also a name. . . . This reality, this nature of things, abides when all else passes. It is the source of all things and the end of all. It surrounds our life as the great abyss into which all things plunge and as the great source whence they all come. What it is we do not know save that it is and that it is the supreme reality with which we must reckon.[1]

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[1] HRN, "Faith in Gods and in God," p. 122.

For Niebuhr, his ability to say to this power, "Though it slay me yet I will trust it," is bound up with Jesus Christ. To turn our mistrust of this power into trust is not something we can reason to or demonstrate. Such faith, as confidence in and loyalty to this last power, has happened in history; and it is communicated to us by those who have such confidence. For Christians, Jesus is the way to such faith; there may be other ways to such faith but they also are in history.[1] From whatever historical source it comes, the ability to believe in God as all-powerful and good is a gift.

> We do not say that this faith in the last power is something men ought to have. We say only this, that it is the end of the road of faith, that it is unassailable, and that when men receive it they receive a great gift. We say that it is given, that it has been given, that it is being given, and that when it is received very profound consequences follow.[2]

The consequence of such faith is that it allows us to see the relativity of all value-systems and it enables us to become inclusive, instead of exclusive, in our moral dealings with nature and with other humans. For radical monotheism, belief is in the Center of value as the principle of being.

> . . . its reference is to no one reality among the many but to One beyond all the many, whence all the many derive their being and by participation in it they exist. As faith, it is reliance on the source of all being for the significance of the self and of all that exists. It is the assurance that because I am, I am valued, and because you are, you are beloved, and because whatever is has being, therefore it is worthy of love, It is confidence that whatever is, is good, because it exists as one thing among the many which all have their origin and their being, in the One—the principal of being which is also the principle of value.[3]

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[1] Ibid., pp. 122-25. [2] Ibid., p. 125 [3] RMWC, p. 32.

Radical monotheism is the term of Niebuhr's analysis of the epistemology of faith. Faith and God go together for Niebuhr. If we are to know God as the all-powerful and the all-good, we must approach all that we place trust in with a critical eye to see whether or not we have made a lesser reality our center of value. Yet, in our critical analysis of faith, we are always aware of the reality of God separate from our experience of him.

CHAPTER SEVEN

AN EPILOGUE

NIEBUHR'S VIEW OF GOD IN TODAY'S WORLD

If I were asked to categorize H. Richard Niebuhr in the context of biblical writers, I would have to say that he belongs to the tradition of wisdom literature. More specifically, I would have to say that he is a modern-day Qoheleth. He comes on the scene after the awareness of election-gone-into-exile, i.e., the time of faith tested and faith tried.

Certainly there is a deep-running current, in this awareness of faith-tried-and-tested, of Niebuhr's own personal struggle with faith as trust in and loyalty to God. But Niebuhr's own personal conflict is never made the center of focus in his thought, nor is the appeal of his thought found in its autobiographical character. Rather, the power of Niebuhr's thought centers around his ability to articulate the general awareness of the inadequate ways that humankind has of speaking about its loss of confidence in the power of life and its loss of confidence in the goodness of the universe within which it lives. Through his persistent criticism of the false securities that people have gained for themselves––through his poignant criticism of the idolatry of humankind as disloyalty and mistrust––Niebuhr has raised a symbolic cry of faith sorely tried. It is, as it were, a global-like cry, an usquequo of the Psalmist now made the lament of all humanity: "How long, oh Lord? Wilt thou forget me for ever? How long . . . ? (Ps. 13.)

The times within which we live have changed from the times of the Psalmist and of Qoheleth. Yet the question still persists: Is God to be trusted? Niebuhr was quite correct in pointing out that the basic religious question for most people is not, "Does God exist?" but rather, "How is faith in God possible?" Indeed, many people may not share Niebuhr's conviction of radical monotheism; but they all do place confidence and trust in something or someone as their center of value. What has become more and more apparent in today's world, threatened with nuclear conflagration and made increasingly aware of nature's ability to reject the human species as unsupportable in the ecology of living things, is the glaring inadequacy of lesser gods to give people confidence to continue to live.

Some thinkers have settled the question of how confidence can be placed in some power, as capable of holding all together, by saying that that power, in the long run, is not to be trusted. In this view, the center of value either is not good or, at the very least, it is not capable of sustaining good, which makes it untrustworthy and thus, in some sense, makes it evil. The fatalism of such an approach has little in common with the radical monotheism of Judaism and Christianity.

Niebuhr never deviated from a strong conviction of God's sovereignty. In the title of this dissertation, and throughout it, we have identified this conviction of Niebuhr as his affirmation of the doctrine of God as taught by orthodox Christianity. We have used the word "orthodox" to mean the general acceptance among Christians of God as all-powerful and all-good, which is seen in their belief in God as Creator and Redeemer. The unique feature about the way in which Niebuhr affirmed God's sovereignty is that he never saw it as providing a universal placebo for the reality of evil and suffering, viz., that somehow God will act miraculously in the present through a sudden suspension of the forces of nature. Niebuhr did believe in an afterlife; but he saw this as fullness of life wherein we come to know more fully the loyalty of God to those who have been loyal to and trusting in him. Afterlife, or salvation, as full awareness of God's loyalty to humankind is the basic way in which Niebuhr interpreted the resurrection of Jesus Christ.[1]

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[1] "But then we recognize that if we want to be loyal to Jesus Christ we are required to be loyal to something more than Jesus Christ; namely, to the cause to which He was loyal and to pray 'Thy Kingdom Come,' not the kingdom of Christ but the Kingdom of God; that we are required to trust not only in the goodness of Jesus Christ but that we are required to trust in the Lord of heaven and earth; and so it becomes apparent to us, it seems to me, that unless there enters into our existence the demonstration, as it were, of the loyalty of the Lord of Heaven and earth to this One who was so loyal to Him and so loyal to his fellow man we can't believe in God. We can believe in Jesus Christ but how can we believe in God unless this triad is complete, and God is loyal to Jesus Christ, and therefore we say that ' Unless Christ be risen from the dead, we are, of all men, the most miserable.' Unless God was loyal

Niebuhr, however, never used the concept of afterlife in the way proponents of a static view of eschatology did, viz., as a way of lulling people into complacency over the evil perpetrated in their world, and as a way of lulling them into a complacency over the suffering involved with living, because all will be well in the hereafter. In the static view, the here and now has little to do with the hereafter. For Niebuhr, however, the sufferings of the present are intimately connected to the meaning of the hereafter. Just as he did not see God acting in a miraculous way to stop the suffering and the evil of the present, he also did not discount the meaning and value of the suffering of the present. There is purpose to suffering; in fact, there is a charism of suffering.

The ability, however, to affirm the positive force of suffering is a grace. More specifically, for Niebuhr, this grace is connected with Jesus Christ. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, Niebuhr learned to transform his negative experience of God, which he knew as mistrust of and disloyalty to that power beyond all human control, into an experience of trust and loyalty. Niebuhr learned to affirm, through the cross of Jesus, what he called "the cause of Jesus Christ."

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to the one who was loyal to Him and who trusted Him to the uttermost, we shall forever remain suspicious of the Source and Origin of all things, the One whom Jesus Christ called Father, but whom we can't call Father unless He saves Christ from the dead. Here the structure of faith which appears in all of our relationships, it seems to me, appears, in a kind of cosmic form." HRN, "The Triad of Faith," p. 10.

That cause, simply stated, is the reconciliation of humankind to God.[1]

The instance in which Niebuhr saw the actuality of the total human experience of God, both as void and enemy, as well as friend and companion, is war. Niebuhr never sat out the experience of war pacifically, as we have seen in the exchange between himself and his brother Reinhold. The mayhem of World War II and the horror of the concentration camps of that time raised up again the same issue for Niebuhr which he faced in that dialogue between himself and his brother.[2]

For Niebuhr, war is the event which best exemplifies the tie-in of all human suffering with the cross of Jesus.[3] War is part of the same order of reality as the cross because it shows so clearly the disorder which human evil wrecks upon humankind and the world, viz., the innocent suffer and die.

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[1] "Jesus Christ is for me, as for many of my fellow Christians, the one who lived and died and rose again for this cause of bringing God to men and men to God and so also of reconciling men to each other and to their world. The establishment of this friendship is to me the key problem in human existence." RS, p. 44.

[2] At this time Niebuhr wrote several articles about the theological meaning of war. See H. Richard Niebuhr, "War as the Judgment of God," The Christian Century 59 (1942): 630-33; H. Richard Niebuhr, "Is God in the War?" The Christian Century 59 (1942): 953-55; H. Richard Niebuhr, "War as Crucifixion," The Christian Century 60 (1943): 513-15; H. Richard Niebuhr, "A Christian Interpretation of War," unpublished paper for the Federal Council Commission, 1943, pp. 1-10.

[3] "If the cross is not only a historical event but a revelation of the order of reality, then war is not only like the cross but must be a demonstration of that same order of God." HRN, "War as Crucifixion," p. 515.

Niebuhr, however, took the suffering caused by war one step further; he saw it also as a "demonstration of divine graciousness."[1]

The ability, however, to see the present suffering of war as a sign of divine graciousness requires the cross of Jesus. Without the cross to interpret it, the scandal of the outrageous suffering caused by war can only be evidence that the power which lies beyond human control is indeed not to be trusted.

> Yet how the divine grace appears in the crucifixion of war may become somewhat clear when the cross of Christ is used to interpret it. Then our attention is directed to the death of the guiltless, the gracious, and the suffering of the innocent becomes a call to repentance to a total revolution of our minds and hearts. And such a call to repentance--not to sorrow but to spiritual revolution--is an act of grace, a great recall from the road to death which we all travel together, the just and the unjust, the victors and the vanquished. Interpreted through the cross of Jesus Christ the suffering of the innocent is seen not as the suffering of temporal men but of the eternal victim 'slain from the foundations of the world.' If the Son of God is being crucified in this war along with the malefactors--and he is being crucified on many an obscure hill--then the graciousness of God, the self-giving love, is more manifest here than in all the years of peace.[2]

Though Niebuhr did not live long enough to experience the full implications of the Vietnam War, he did foresee some of the consequences of it. Speaking of the Western world in 1960, Niebuhr said: "It seems to me that in that world men have become deeply disillusioned about themselves and are becoming disillusioned about their idols--the nations, the spirit of technological civilization and so on." Though Niebuhr was reflecting on what he saw at the end of the fifties, he also had described, quite accurately, the mood of the 1970's. "But in the West the most sensitive, if not yet the most, men are living in a great religious void; their half-gods have gone and the gods have not arrived."[1]

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid.

The problem of the Western world in general, as Niebuhr saw it, was one of the "resymbolization" of the meaning of God.[2] For him, this meant renewed confidence in the God of radical monotheism. In my opinion, Niebuhr's analysis of the epistemology of faith is of major importance, in today's world, for the resymbolization of the meaning of God.

By taking up a stance in a realist epistemology, he placed his theological considerations about the experience of God in dialogue with those people most responsible for the shaping of the Western world as it is today, viz., with those men and women involved in the natural and social sciences. Obviously, many of these people do not pursue the presuppositions of their sciences out to their ultimate principle, or center of value. But for those who have, and for the increasingly larger number of those who are beginning to do so, Niebuhr's understanding of the human experience of God bears a hearing.

That Niebuhr's thought carries with it the invitation to dialogue is not surprising in the light of his social view of the human self. And that his thought is, in particular, attuned to the problems confronting the Western world is not surprising in the light of his awareness of the cultural conditioning of human thought and practice. He was a man of his own time and place, a milieu which he saw as the Western world confronted with theological and ethical questions about what to do with its technological prowess.

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[1] HRN, "Reformation: Continuing Imperative," p. 250.

[2] "I look for a resymbolization of the message and the life of faith in the One God." _Ibid_., p. 251.

The special emphasis which Niebuhr still brings to the round table of debate in the Western world is his understanding of theology as the facilitator of the dialogue among the sciences, or as he put it, the understanding of theology as the Servant, not the Queen, of the sciences.[1] When it is acting in its role as Servant, theology can first of all protest against any tendency to absolutize anything relative. Theology, however, has more than a negative function; its positive side can be seen in its affirmation of God's sovereignty.

> But the protest is only the negative side of the positive conviction which such theology seeks to demonstrate. This is the conviction that there is an ultimate world, a word of God; that there is a universal Sovereignty, or better, that the universal power, whence come life and death, is good; it is the conviction that man when he is right in any way—right in inquiry, right in thought, right in conduct, right in belief—is right by faith, right by virtue of his reliance upon and his loyalty to the last word and the universal Sovereign.[2]

In this quotation, we see Niebuhr, once again, affirming the sovereignty of God as the basis of his theology. We have focused on this conviction of his throughout this dissertation not only because Niebuhr saw it as paramount in his thought but also because Niebuhr's analysis of the convictional character of human knowledge, as _fiducia_ and _fidelitas_, has added a new dimension to the question of what is the meaning of God in human history. Niebuhr has not just reaffirmed the biblical monotheistic faith in God's sovereignty; he has also restated the dogma of God's sovereignty in a way which helps toward resymbolizing the meaning of God for the Western world.

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[1] H. Richard Niebuhr, "Theology in the University," RMWC (New York: Harper & Row, Harper Torchbooks, 1970), pp. 93-99. First published as "Theology--Not Queen but Servant," The Journal of Religion 35 (1955): 1-5.

[2] Ibid., p. 95.

What we have done in this dissertation is to see how Niebuhr's critical realism is the basic ingredient in his resymbolization of the meaning of God. His epistemological analysis of faith, as _fiducia_ and _fidelitas_, gives a new depth to the dogmatic assertion of God's sovereignty. Out of this understanding of faith in God as _fiducia_ and _fidelitas_, Niebuhr developed his principle of relationality in terms of which he could situate the relativity of everything else but God. Part of Niebuhr's understanding of relationality is his understanding of God as the Center of value who is neither to be equated with a particular value nor with a particular relation. As the Center of value, God is both the principle of being and the principle of good who establishes the worth of everyone and everything contextually.

Niebuhr's epistemological understanding of faith points out the fiduciary character of all human knowing. Through his analysis of the faith-character of knowing as trust/mistrust and loyalty/disloyalty, Niebuhr asked of everyone a critical appraisal of what it is they have placed their trust in and given their loyalty to. Through this epistemological understanding, Niebuhr provided such an approach to the reality of deity, which lies behind the religious experience of it, that with this epistemological understanding one can speak of the reality of God and the human experience of him in a way comprehensible to men and women who are trained in the empirical sciences.

One way of viewing Niebuhr's epistemology of faith is to see it as confessional theology. The essence of a confessional theology is that it is non-apologetic. For Niebuhr, it meant that he could claim a Christian experience of the absolute, which is God, without claiming that the Christian experience of God is the only valid experience of him. At the heart of this confessional theology is Niebuhr's epistemology of faith as fiducia and fidelitas. The emphasis is therefore on metanoia, that is, a questioning by each person of the convictional base of their faith to see if it is idolatrous or not. Its emphasis is not on trying to convince another that this conviction is the only true one.

The questions which can be asked of this confessional theology are: Is it enough to remain on an epistemological level? In fact, are not there some metaphysical statements implicit in Niebuhr's epistemological analysis of faith that need to be made more explicit? And by making these metaphysical statements more explicit, has not one taken up an apologetic, defensive stance?

These kinds of questions also lie behind John B. Cobb's criticism of Niebuhr's lack of metaphysical explicitness. Cobb sees Niebuhr's reluctance to make metaphysical statements about God as begging the question. "It is in terms of non-confessional principles that confessionalism is held to be the only legitimate expression for Christian faith. Confessional affirmations, therefore, should not be used to support the principles in terms of which confessionalism is vindicated."[1]

Cobb sees Niebuhr stepping outside the realm of confessional theology in order to affirm its confessional character. By doing so, Niebuhr has therefore claimed the truth of a certain position which says that his position is not true just for those who have the same perspective, but also for all humans. In Cobb's view, Niebuhr has not only made some epistemological claims for the relativity of everything but also some metaphysical claims.

On the basis of his observation on an implicit metaphysics in Niebuhr, Cobb thinks Niebuhr should have gone beyond an epistemological realism and drawn out the ontological elements involved in relativity.

> Theological scholarship is profoundly indebted to Niebuhr for calling attention to the relativity of all historical knowledge and for working out the implications of this relativity for theological work. But it seems that Niebuhr

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[1] John B. Cobb, Living Options in Protestant Theology: A Survey of Methods (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962), p. 300.

> must either go still farther or else draw back from some of his own relativistic assertions.[1]

One can question Cobb's criticism of Niebuhr in the light of our analysis of the development of, and use of, critical realism in Niebuhr's thought. Niebuhr's principle of relationality does underlie his understanding of the relativity of human knowledge and ethical practice. Everything and everyone is in relation to God, the all-powerful and the all-good; this relation makes everything relative but God. However vaguely articulated, humans do come to know God in the triadic relationship which Niebuhr discerned in the fiduciary character of knowledge; often this knowledge is expressed as mistrust of and disloyalty to this Center of value. Though Niebuhr himself did not expand the ontological implications involved in this human experience of God as the One either to be trusted or mistrusted, the awareness of God as a Self and as a Person is very strong in Niebuhr's theology.

Therefore Cobb is correct to single out Niebuhr's affirmation of God as Person and as Self, as an example of a confessional-like statement which is also a statement making a metaphysical claim. By speaking of God as a Self who knows and loves us, Niebuhr has made an implicit metaphysical statement about the principle of being and the principle of good, insofar as it implies that "an apprehension of God as wholly impersonal is inferior if not illusory."[2]

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[1] *Ibid*.

[2] *Ibid*., p. 298.

As I see the theological task in the light of Niebuhr's critical realism, the need is now to seek further what are the implications of God as Person and as a Self for theology and ethics. What these implications are I myself do not as yet fully understand. I find Niebuhr's epistemological analysis of faith insightful and helpful in our contemporary problem about the meaning of God. Like Niebuhr, I am inclined to shy away from metaphysics because of the tendency therein to assume a defensive posture. Yet the times may be changing so that it is more opportune to press the metaphysical questions about the reality of deity. To this shift in emphasis, however, I can hear Niebuhr addressing himself, Qoheleth-like: "There is a time for affirming and a time for discerning." He undoubtedly was part of the time for affirming God's sovereignty and not part of the time for delineating God's nature metaphysically.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX

A COMMUNICATION

The Only Way Into the Kingdom of God[1]

Editor The CHRISTIAN CENTURY:

Sir: Since you have given me leave to fire one more shot in the fraternal war between my brother and me over the question of pacifism, I shall attempt to place it as well as I can, not for the purpose of demolishing my opponent's position--which our thirty years' war has shown me to be impossible--but for the sake of pointing as accurately as I can to the exact locus of the issue between us. It does not lie in the question of activity or inactivity, to which my too journalistic approach to the problem directed attention; we are speaking after all of two kinds of activity. The fundamental question seems to me to be whether "the history of mankind is a perennial tragedy" which can derive meaning only from a goal which lies beyond history, as my brother maintains, or whether the "eschatological" faith, to which I seek to adhere, is justifiable. In that faith tragedy is only the prelude to fulfilment, and a prelude which is necessary because of human nature; the kingdom of God comes inevitably, though whether we shall see it or not, depends on our recognition of its presence and our acceptance of the only kind of life which will enable us to enter it, the life of repentance and forgiveness.

For my brother God is outside the historical processes, so much so that he charges me with faith in a miracle-working deity which interferes occasionally, sometimes brutally, sometimes redemptively, in this history. But God, I believe, is always in history; he is the structure in things, the source of all meaning, the "I am that I am," that which is that it is. He is the rock against which we beat in vain, that which bruises and overwhelms us when we seek to impose our wishes, contrary to his, upon him. That structure of the universe, that creative will, can no more be said to interfere brutally in history than the violated laws of my organism can be said to interfere brutally with my life if they make me pay the cost of my violation. That structure of the universe, that will of God, does bring war and depression upon us when we bring it upon ourselves, for we live in the kind of world which visits our iniquities upon us and our children, no matter how much we pray and desire that it be otherwise.

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[1] Taken from The Christian Century 49 (1932): 447

Self-interest acts destructively in this world; it calls forth counter assertion on the part of exploited classes. The result is war, economic, military, verbal; and it is judgment. But this same structure in things which is our enemy is our redeemer; "it means intensely and means good"--not the good which we desire, but the good which we would desire if we were good and really wise. History is not a perennial tragedy but a road to fulfilment and that fulfilment requires the tragic outcome of every self-assertion, for it is a fulfilment which can only be designated as "love." It has created fellowship in atoms and organisms, at bitter cost to electrons and cells; and it is creating something better than human selfhood but at bitter cost to that selfhood. This is not a faith in progress, for evil grows as well as good and every self-assertion must be eliminated somewhere and somehow--by innocence suffering for guilt, it seems.

If, however, history is no more than tragedy, if there is no fulfilment in it, then my brother is right. Then we must rest content with the clash of self-interested individuals, personal or social. But in that case I see no reason why we should qualify the clash of competition with a homeopathic dose of Christian "love."

The only harmony which can possibly result from the clash of interests is the harmony imposed by the rule of the strong or a parallelogram of social forces, whether we think of the interclass structure or the international world. To import any pacifism into this struggle is only to weaken the weaker self-asserters (India, China or the proletariat) or to provide the strong with a facade of "service" behind which they can operate with a salved conscience. (Pacificism, on the other hand, as a method of self-assertion, is not pacifism at all but only a different kind of war.)

The method which my brother recommends, that of qualifying the social struggle by means of some Christian love, seems to me to be only the old method of making Christian love an ambulance driver in the wars of interested and clashing parties. If it is more than that it is weakening of the forces whose success we think necessary for a juster social order. For me the question is one of "either-or;" either the Christian method, which is not the method of love but of repentance and forgiveness, or the method of self-assertion; either nationalism or Christianity, either capitalism-communism or Christianity. The attempt to qualify the one method by the other is hopeless compromise.

I think that to apply the terms "Christian perfectionism" or "Christian ideal" to my approach is rather misleading. I rather think that Dewey is quite right in his war on ideals; they always seem irrelevant to our situation and betray us into a dualistic morality. The society of love is an impossible human ideal, as the fellowship of the organism is an impossible ideal for the cell. It is not an ideal toward which we can strive, but an "emergent," a potentiality in our situation which remains unrealized so long as we try to impose our pattern, our wishes upon the divine creative process.

Man's task is not that of building Utopias but that of eliminating weeds and tilling the soil so that the kingdom of God can grow. His method is not one of striving for perfection or of acting perfectly, but of clearing the road by repentance and forgiveness. That this approach is valid for societies as well as for individuals and that the opposite approach will always involve us in the same one ceaseless cycle of assertion and counter-assertion, is what I am concerned to emphasize.

H. Richard Niebuhr.

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II. Selected Unpublished Material by H. Richard Niebuhr[1]

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"The Reformers' Ideal of a Church in the World," Albany, 1939, 15 pp. (typewritten).

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"The Shape of Things to Come," baccalaureate sermon, Connecticut College, 5 June 1943, 7 pp. (typewritten).

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"The Alter-Ego Dialogue and Conscience," read at the American Theological Society, April 1945 (typed, longer version of the published article).

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"The Nature of Faith." I. "Faith in Question" (basis for Chapter One of the projected book Faith on Earth, rewritten many times); II. "The Triple Bond," 13 pp. (handwritten); III. "Faith and Community," 8 pp. (handwritten); IV. "Mediators of Faith," 23 pp. (handwritten). Given at the Theological Seminary of the Evangelical and Reformed Church, Lancaster, Penn., Swander Lectures 13-15 November 1950.

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B. Materials Not Definitely Dated

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"On the Nature of Faith," essay, 11 pp. (typewritten).

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"The Logic of the Cross," sermon, 10 pp. (typewritten).

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I. "Faith Seeks Understanding," 32 pp.
II. "Towards Understanding Understanding," 24 pp.
III. "Faith Is a Relation Between Selves," 30 pp.
IV. "The Trialectic of Faith," 41 pp.

Faith on Earth. Book manuscript of seven chapters on which HRN worked over a period from 1952 to 1958. Chapters are:

I. "Faith in Question, 24 pp.
II. "The Method of Reflection," 16 pp.
III. "Believing and Knowing in Community, 15 pp.
IV. "The Structure of Faith," 23 pp.
V. "Broken Faith," 23 pp.
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